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Starting from Scratch: Community, Connection, and Women's Culinary Culture

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Starting from Scratch: Community, Connection, and Women's Culinary Culture

by

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Dedication

For Big Mama, whose banana pudding delighted me; Granny, whose fried chicken haunts me; and Mom, who was a terrible cook.

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Starting from Scratch: Community, Connection, and Women's Culinary Culture

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This dissertation examines how women's food writing, from blogs to cookbooks to novels, demonstrate a desire to articulate themselves as people within communities rather than accept a dehumanized identity as a consumer or set of credit-card numbers. I argue that through an emphasis on connection with one another via a discourse of scratch cooking and locally sourced foods, women are able to push back against the hegemony of corporate food and industrial agriculture. Working from a case study model, each of my chapters examines the distinct ways in which women assert their personhood apart from the homogenizing influences of mainstream food culture. As a means of articulating this woman's culinary culture, predicated on a foundation of scratch cooking and local ingredients and relationships, I examine the food blog Fed Up With Lunch and the author's use of an anonymous persona to interrogate the federal school lunch program; feminist vegetarian and vegan cookbooks authored by collectives of women who rely on oppositional identities in order to push back against what they view as hegemony; how diasporic Indian women use scratch cooking as a means of self-expression within the

context of migration; and the novel cookbook as an example of injecting a feminist discourse of food into a traditional fictional narrative. Read together, these discrete case studies make an argument for women's power to effect meaningful change from within the circumscribed space of the kitchen.

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The passive American consumer, sitting down to a meal of pre-prepared food, confronts inert, anonymous substances that have been processed, dyed, breaded, sauced, gravied, ground, pulped, strained, blended, prettified, and sanitized beyond resemblance to any part of any creature that ever lived. The products of nature and agriculture have been made, to all appearances, the products of industry. Both eater and eaten are thus in exile from biological reality.
— Wendell Berry

If more of us valued food and cheer and song above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world.
– J.R.R. Tolkien

Introduction: Corporate Food, Countercuisines, and "Gracious Womanhood"

"Food isn't just about what's on the menu anymore." – Laura Shapiro, *Perfection Salad*

"Crisco never varies." – 1912 advertisement

In the epigraph to *Howards End* (1910), E.M. Forster quotes his heroine, Margaret Schlegel, imploring readers to "Only connect…" Forster's mandate, voiced through Margaret, is to make human connections in a hostile world, to "live in fragments no longer." As the novel's plot suggests, to "only connect" is a difficult task indeed, but one worth undertaking, for the joys of human connection surpass those of the world. And while the contexts for Forster's modernist novel and the contemporary texts comprising this study could not be more different, the mandate for this dissertation is the same: Only connect. Connect to food, to nature, to community. To slice through the chatter of a globalized economy driven in part by cheap corn subsidies made manifest in superprocessed glop masquerading as food, and instead find the joy of sharing a meal prepared together. To be fully present at table with our friends and families, both while talking and tasting. The overarching argument of this dissertation is that rather than be passive about our food, blindly consuming the products engineered to stimulate our taste buds, we reexamine how we value food, how we think about food, and even what constitutes food. We need to recognize the sameness of mass-produced corporate foods and their synthetic nature, and that there is no community to be found in the segmented, segregated portions of a frozen dinner. While the products of the corporate food system have been developed to provide familiarity and stability, sold to us on the promise that

they will always be there for us, what they have actually done is facilitated our disconnection from ourselves, each other, and from the world around us. This dissertation argues for *connection*. To find community in food means to live in fragments no longer, to define our collective identities apart from our roles as consumers.

What currently prevents us from discerning ourselves as people rather than as consumers is at the root of Robert Reich's *Supercapitalism* (2007). Reich traces a downward trend in American cultural values, which include inadequate health-care coverage, climate change, the "crassness and coarseness" of American culture and the demise of Main Street from what he terms the "Not Quite Golden Age." Rooted in the postwar economic boom of the 1950s and 1960s when the Dow held steadily and comfortably at below 1000 points, workers could count on continued employment with reliable increases in pay from their entry into the workplace until their retirement, and executives held the role of "corporate statesmen" charged with looking out for the well-being of society. At the same time, however, women and people of color remained politically and economically disenfranchised; poverty was rendered invisible, relegated to "rural hollows or black ghettos" (15). Back then, in the era of what Reich terms "democratic capitalism," everyone looked out for each other. Sure, life was pretty boring, says Reich, but the middle class was stable and far from teetering on the razor's edge; today, many middle-class families are one illness or car accident away from financial disaster.

Reich traces the rise of supercapitalism — which he defines as the aggregation of citizens' power as consumers, rather than as members of communities committed to

achieving a common good — and the decline of democratic capitalism to the technologies that arose in the mid- to late 1970s. These technologies, which include container shipping, semiconductors, fiber optics, satellites, and, eventually, the Internet, gave rise to a new way of doing business and lead to three important developments leading to this new economy: globalization, new production processes, and deregulation. Americans' power comes from being consumers, not citizens, says Reich, largely because these processes present consumers with a whole planet of endless competing choices bearing low prices designed to entice. Americans became enamored with getting the best deal possible and as a result have sacrificed collective values, job security, health care, and public education. Reich's message is simple: Let corporations' concerns remain their bottom line and let the citizenry reclaim power as members of communities rather than as a mass of credit-card numbers.

As I have observed and participated in the discourse surrounding our food-supply system over the past six years, I feel it is appropriate to extend Reich's analysis to America's food-production and -supply system. We have become addicted to cheap food, from corn-sweetened cereals to fast-food dollar menus to sale-priced soft drinks adding nothing to our bodies but empty calories and artificial colorings. Our tacit acceptance of a polluted food-supply system is but another symptom of what Reich describes as the decline of American values. But this is not a dissertation about capitalism, necessarily, or about globalization, particularly. Rather, it is an intimate study of the ways that we consume and the strategies of change and resistance that emerge in relationship to Big Food and the ways in which women mediate their relationships to corporate foodstuffs in

the interest of making themselves and their communities visible as something other than consumers.

In her afterword to the 2008 edition of *Perfection Salad*, Laura Shapiro sums up the landscape of the discourse surrounding food thusly:

> The conversation is shifting, convenience no longer automatically gets the last word. It has been quite a while since most people associated the food on their plates with agriculture of any sort. Now the connection is being restored, sometimes only in the form of a mantra – "fresh and local" – but often with an awareness of the environmental and health issues surrounding modern conventional farming. […] gastronomy, for the first time, has gained a political edge. (229)

My project is situated right in the center of this matrix of food discourse as described by Shapiro. As I will discuss later in this introduction, my project incorporates the politicized discussions taking place around corporate agriculture, which I argue has environmental, feminist, animal rights, health, and third-world implications, while also addressing the role of cookbooks and recipe exchanges in gendered discourse, to the problematics of representing communities in tension with individual identities. Building on the foundational work done by feminist food critics and historians Susan J. Leonardi, Laura Shapiro, Jessamyn Neuhaus, and Sherrie Inness — specifically, their research and conclusions about the prescriptive, pedagogical, and transgressive nature and potential of cookbooks, recipes, and cooking itself — I demonstrate the ways in which women

privilege the local and express their individual identities in relation to their communities via an emphasis on scratch cooking.

My aim in this project is not to figure women as the infallible heroines that will rescue us from what many consider to be a poisoned and corrupt food system; indeed, I will demonstrate that many highly visible women are complicit in this system and, as a result, exploit the communities that have formed around them. Rather, I am concerned with textual representations of these concerns about and responses to corporate food and how these representations balance global concerns (i.e., environmental, feminist, economic, and so on) with those of local, community concerns. What does the community that privileges industrial food look like and what is at stake for the community that eschews corporate intervention into the food supply? Following Susan J. Leonardi's example, I treat cookbooks, recipes, and food blogs as literary texts alongside novels as a way of approaching these concerns. In doing so, I open up a space to explore how women negotiate issues of political, ideological, national, and gender identity via their relationships to food. Much of feminist food criticism to this point has been concerned with the messages transmitted to women via cookbooks and other food-related media. Very little of it contends with women's living responses to those messages or the ways in which cooking serves as a site of resistance for women unsatisfied with mainstream foodways. This dissertation is an attempt to add such a consideration to the already established discourse in the hopes of ascertaining a women's countercuisine that fosters community and engenders a change in the way we think about food.

Some women, as I will demonstrate, do not problematize their relationships with Big Food in the slightest; instead, they embrace it wholeheartedly and derive great joy from it. Others stake their individual and collective identities on a complete turn away from Big Food as a way to advance a feminist or ethical (or both) agenda. Still others are more subtle and nuanced in their negotiations, privileging direct contact with farmers and merchants or choosing to adhere strictly to a scratch-cooking regimen in order to craft or maintain their identities as individual women while still in relation to local communities. To that end, the strategies deployed in these texts can be grouped loosely into four categories: privileging local communities, utilizing organic ingredients, scratch recipes as counternarratives, and vegetarianism as resistance. These strategies emphasize a focus on the pleasures of cooking locally sourced food eaten within the context of a like-minded community, in service to a relationship with food that rejects the omnipresence of Big Food in the American diet.

The Revolution Will Not Be Microwaved[1]

Crucial to my central argument within this dissertation is a clear definition of what I mean when I say "Big Food." The term refers to an aggregate of gigantic corporations involved in the world's food supply at every level; these corporations include but are not limited to Monsanto, which counts among its major products Agent Orange, the herbicide RoundUp, recombinant Bovine Growth Hormone, and genetically

[1] See Katz, Sandor Ellix. *The Revolution Will Not Be Microwaved: Inside America's Underground Food Movements*. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2006. Print.

modified corn, soybean, and canola; General Mills, the parent company of famous food brands Betty Crocker, Pillsbury, and Green Giant; Con-Agra, parent company of such brands as Healthy Choice, Hebrew National, and Chef Boyardee; Archer Daniels Midland, which provides ingredients like high fructose corn syrup and textured vegetable protein (TVP®) to commercial food manufacturers; and Tyson, which raises, processes, and exports a wide variety of packaged meat products from chicken nuggets to pre-cooked bacon.[2]

Big Food is closely associated with genetically modified organisms (GMOs), overreliance on fossil fuels, contaminated food, filthy and inhumane factory farms and contained animal feeding operations (CAFOs), the abuse and exploitation of migrant laborers, and the imminent extinction of the independent family farm. As Big Food extends its control of the food supply, we see more giant companies absorbing independent and artisan manufacturers, as in the recent purchase of Cadbury by Kraft Foods, effectively drawing all mainstream food, from seed to shelf, under the Big Food umbrella. Corporation-driven Big Food is often thought of in opposition to small-scale, local, relationship-based agriculture and food production, and, as I will demonstrate, has become entrenched in the American diet over the past 40 years.

Because food is such an integral part of daily life, food-based corporations have been held accountable for their actions by variously effective means. As the changes in the ways that corporations did business as described by Reich took hold, activists and

[2] In June 2011, the *New York Times* reported that Tyson Foods had admitted to making illegal bribes to veterinarians in Mexico tasked with certifying the safety of the food being processed in Tyson's plants in that country.

advocacy groups called for greater corporate responsibility on both the global and local levels. Lisbeth Segerlund traces the emergence of corporate social responsibility to three major events in the 1970s: the UN's attempt to instill an international code of conduct for transnational corporations, the anti-apartheid movement, and the Nestlé boycott, which is a particularly trenchant example of an international food corporation being held responsible for its dealings on a local level.

In 1977, the U.S.-based Infant Formula Action Coalition (INFACT) spearheaded a boycott against the Switzerland-based Nestlé Corporation in response to its aggressive push into the third world in support of its increasingly popular infant formulas: "The colonies were an important market for breast-milk substitutes, due to increasing participation by women in plantation work (equivalent to the effect of industrialization on women in Europe and North America)" (Segerlund 56-7). The problem with targeting women in developing nations, proponents of the boycott argued, is that formula is expensive, which led women to dilute the formula to make it last longer, thereby depriving their babies of proper nourishment; additional concerns included the lack of access to clean water, because formula mixed with dirty water could be catastrophic to a baby's health (Kedrowski and Lipscomb 132). In 1981, the World Health Organization adopted the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes, which includes numerous guidelines and restrictions "including resolutions to instruct health care workers to promote breast-feeding and clearly state the hazards associated with use of formula, ban the distribution of free formula samples to new mothers, ban the use of aggressive marketing practices, […] and forbid formula company salespersons from

providing instruction on infant care to new mothers" (Kedrowski and Lipscomb 133). In 1984, the leaders of the boycott met with Nestlé executives, who agreed to implement the code, and the boycott was suspended.

However, the boycott was taken back up in 1988 when reports emerged that baby formula companies had resumed their aggressive marketing tactics in the third world. The boycott continues to this day, with British journalists reporting WHO violations in Mozambique and Bangladesh;[3] Nestlé claims to have been in continuous code compliance. At the same time, activists continue to compile advertisements aimed at mothers that clearly violate, if not the letter, then the spirit of the WHO code. For example, Baby Milk Action confronted Nestlé regarding a 2003 Cape Town, South Africa advertisement that invites mothers to enjoy an "absorbing 15-minute talk on baby feeding" and visit with "Blue Bear and the Baby-Care Friends" should they have any questions about "what, when and how to feed" their babies.[4] Nestlé's internal auditors declared the company innocent of WHO code violations, despite the fact that the advertisement clearly seeks to make direct contact with mothers and advise them on the care and feeding of their infants. Similarly, Flickr user Lita Mariana compiled a set of formula advertisements found in Indonesian publications that are perhaps more insidious than the Cape Town Nestlé ad. These advertisements deploy a rhetoric of excellence and a promise of "holistic nutrition" couched in pseudoscientific language in order to entice

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3 See Moorhead, Joanna. "Milking It." *Guardian* 15 May 2007: n. pag. Web. 12 Mar 2011. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2007/may/15/medicineandhealth.lifeandhealth>.

4 "Campaign for Ethical Marketing." *Baby Milk Action*. Baby Milk Action, 05 2005. Web. 13 Apr 2011. <http://www.babymilkaction.org/CEM/cemmay05.html#1>.

mothers to substitute the product for their breast milk,[5] regardless of whether she can accommodate the expense of such substitutes.[6] For example, one Indonesian advertisement for Nestle Excella Gold promises an improved immune system, brain development, and "optimal physical growth" due to the presence of linoleic acid, linolenic acid, and bifidus BL.[7] Even the name of the product, "Excella Gold" promises excellence of the highest order (although one wonders if there is an "Excella Platinum" and if so, what benefits it may provide for Indonesian children). It is this type of colonization of the collective psyche of food consumers by Big Food that Baby Milk Action and others are pushing back against in their emphasis on locally sourced, whole foods.

Where some advocates organized boycotts, others formed countercultural food colonies informed by a theory of action rooted in a necessary and warranted suspicion of Big Food. Warren Belasco, in *Appetite for Change: How the Counterculture Took On the Food Industry* (2006), illustrates the process by which countercultural cuisine was absorbed by Big Food and made mainstream. Belasco examines the effects the late 1960s countercultural movement had on the way we think of food today, arguing that the turn of certain tribes of cultural rebels against mainstream foodways spawned a countercuisine, which Belasco defines as "a coherent set of alternative food beliefs, practices, and institutions" (x). The crux of his argument is that to align oneself with a food practice

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[5] The copyright-protected images can be found at http://www.flickr.com/photos/litamariana/sets/72157600294882124/with/524276282/.

[6] More recently, Nestle has been targeted by anticorporate protesters who object to the company's practice of using cocoa from Ivory Coast cocoa plantations, which rely on child laborers who are often the victims of human trafficking.

[7] Many thanks to Georgette Tan for her translation assistance.

rooted in radical politics is to express an oppositional identity, and that "food fights have often accompanied grass roots political struggles" (15). One example Belasco references is the critique of processed food in the early 20th century as an expression of "dangerous urban-industrial conditions" (15) due in no small part to the conditions portrayed in Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906). Belasco identifies the desires of the countercultural food reformists as comprising a drive to "align private action with planetary needs; the distrust of chemicals and technology; the resanctification of nature; the enthusiasm for small farms and organic methods; the intrinsic delight in whole foods; the sense that a better society might have to be built literally from the grass roots" (10). The progenitors of the countercuisine viewed the industrialization of the food supply as an alienation from nature, and that society needed to return to the land and to privilege local connections and relationships in order to repair itself. This emphasis on harnessing the power of local communities is at the center of what I see happening across my texts, and I examine the various iterations of this ideological turn over the course of my dissertation.

While some called for greater accountability on the part of large food corporations, and others grew and harvested their food on communes, others focused on the *extremely* local, making their bodies and their own individual consumption the site at which they negotiated their global concerns. Francis Moore Lappé, whom I will discuss at greater length in Chapter Two, called for greater accountability on the individual level in *Diet For a Small Planet* (1971). In it, she made connections between industrial agriculture (namely, meat production) and third-world poverty. Lappé argued for those in developed nations to adopt a vegetarian diet in order to minimize the enormous waste

generated by the grain-fed meat industry and to make food resources more readily available to those in developing countries. Lappé was among the first cultural critics to make damning connections among industrial agriculture, poverty, and poor health, but sweeping changes to United States agricultural policy subsumed her argument.

The same year that Lappé's book was published, Earl Butz, dean of Agriculture at Purdue University and a board member of Ralston Purina[8] at the time, was appointed by President Richard Nixon as Secretary of Agriculture. Butz took as his mandate the gutting of New Deal-era grain-supply management policies, sold the U.S. grain surplus to the Soviet Union in 1972, and encouraged American farmers to "plant fence row to fence row" on the argument that any oversupply could be sold overseas. As a result, farmers accrued enormous amounts of debt in order to fulfill Butz's commands to "go big or get out"; this accelerated demand for seed and the resultant massive crop yields set the stage for Monsanto's RoundUp herbicide, which entered the market in 1973, and genetically modified RoundUp Ready soy, corn, canola seeds to penetrate and monopolize the market. Indeed, the relationship between Butz's policies is directly proportional to Monsanto's eventual transition from a chemical manufacturing corporation to a biotechnology corporation. By 1980, RoundUp became — and still is — the number one selling herbicide in the world. Monsanto developed its first genetically modified plants in 1982 and conducted its first field tests of GE crops five years later. In 1996, the first

[8] Philpott, Tom. "A reflection on the lasting legacy of 1970s USDA Secretary Earl Butz." *Grist* 7 February 2008: n. pag. Web. 24 Mar 2011. <http://www.grist.org/article/the-butz-stops-here/>.

RoundUp Ready crop of soybeans became available commercially; RoundUp Ready corn debuted two years later.

Beginning in 2004, the corporation began suing small, independent farmers for patent infringement, accusing them of selling crops containing genetic material patented by Monsanto; the farmers claimed contamination caused by cross-pollination and drift. Monsanto also aggressively pursues family farmers they suspect may be cleaning and saving seed, even organic farmers who might have accidentally saved contaminated seed; in this way, Monsanto reduces farmers' ability to remain competitive by abolishing the traditional practice of seed saving and requiring them to purchase new seeds every season. These methods are just a few examples of the ways in which Big Food has become entrenched in America's daily diet and they can all be traced back to Earl Butz's ideological approach to agriculture.

This aggressive correction to what Butz[9] viewed as socialism in the form of New Deal agricultural policy resulted in a market flooded with grain and severely depressed prices. Surviving farms were bought up by larger conglomerates, which continued to plant fence row to fence row on much larger farms, which led to an absolute glut of cheap materials. The glut of excess corn, alongside rising sugar prices, led food producers to turn to high fructose corn syrup (HFCS) as a cheap sweetener. Since its introduction as a sugar replacement in Coca-Cola and Pepsi in 1984, HFCS has infiltrated the processed-food market, appearing in a wide variety of foods including juice, graham crackers,

[9] Butz resigned from his position in disgrace after making racist remarks on a commercial flight in October 1976.

ketchup, lunchmeat, yogurt, bread, soup, salad dressing, and cough syrup. Corporations like Archer Daniels Midland lobby for the continuation of corn subsidies, despite the catastrophic effect the practice has had on the American (and global) diet, because HFCS generates hundreds of millions of dollars of profit for the company.[10] The cattle industry saw an explosion in the use of corn-based CAFOs, which many critics see as a direct threat to public health. The spread of bovine spongiform encephalopathy, or "mad cow disease," as well as the 1993 outbreak of *E. coli* from tainted Jack in the Box hamburgers that killed four children and sickened more than 400 others in Washington state have both been linked to the use of CAFOs and their feeding and manure-management practices.[11]

These two major public-health crises got people talking about food again in the same vein as Sinclair and the activists described by Belasco. Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of The American Meal* (2001) provided an unflattering portrait of the machinations behind the Big Mac, from exploitative and life-threatening employment practices, to marketing directed at children in an attempt to ensnare lifelong brand loyalty, to revealing meat-packing practices that include feeding rendered animal remains to CAFO cattle. The following year, Marion Nestle, a nutrition scientist and professor of sociology at New York University, published *Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health* (2002), which reveals the various ways in which Big

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[10] See Philpott, Tom. "A speculation about why ADM's HFCS business is booming." *Grist* 10 May 2006: n. pag. Web. 4 Apr 2011. <http://www.grist.org/article/adm-high-fructose-corn-syrup-and-ethanol>.

[11] For more information on the links between CAFO feeding practices and the spread of mad cow disease, see Rampton, Sheldon, and John Stauber. *Mad Cow USA*. Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 2002. Print. For more information on the links between CAFO manure management and outbreaks of *E. coli*, see Ebner, Paul. "CAFOs and Public Health: Pathogens and Manure." *Purdue Extension: CAFOs Fact Sheet*. (2007): n. page. Print.

Food informs our food-based decisions in order to increase its profit margins, making myriad connections between industrial agriculture and the catastrophe that is the American diet. In 2004, filmmaker Morgan Spurlock made the political intimately personal when he undertook and documented a 30-day all-McDonald's diet in order to demonstrate the harmful effects of a fast-food diet on the body, as well as interrogating the ways in which the fast-food industry encourages poor nutritional choices in the interest of profits.[12] The resulting film, *Super Size Me*, was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature.

A flurry of texts emerged from 2007 to 2009, including the documentary *King Corn*, in which college friends Ian Cheney and Curtis Ellis followed an acre of corn from planting to market in an effort to demonstrate the near-complete industrialization of American agriculture and its devastating economic and health effects. A 2008 documentary, *Food, Inc.*, which was co-produced by Eric Schlosser and features interviews with him and Michael Pollan, levels critiques at agribusiness, from meat and grain production to the enormous lobbying powers that allow Big Food to manipulate and influence federal regulatory policies. Barbara Kingsolver's 2008 memoir, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, charted her family's yearlong experiment of eating only what they grew or could acquire in their rural Virginia community, a practice that would become known as locavorism.

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[12] Over the course of the experiment, Spurlock gained approximately 25 pounds, his cholesterol shot up to 230 points, experienced mood swings and sexual dysfunction, and developed fatty deposits on his liver that caused it to start shutting down. Spurlock was able to reverse the effects of his McDonald's diet with a strict vegan diet supervised by his wife, Alexandra.

Michael Pollan helped to ignite the discourse of locavorism with *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (2006), which investigates the diverse costs — economic and human — embedded in the practice of industrial agriculture, primarily as it pertains to the corn monoculture midwifed by Earl Butz. Pollan traces the ubiquity of corn in the American diet, particularly the rise of HFCS in place of less-processed, more expensive sweeteners like cane sugar, and its effects on Americans' health as well as the myriad economic and environmental impact of the industrial corn monoculture. Ultimately, Pollan argues for a sustainable agriculture rooted in an emphasis on locally grown foods. His follow-up, *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto* (2008), is an attempt to answer the question that arose from his previous work, which is "well, what *should* we eat?" His answer: "Eat food, not too much, mostly plants." *In Defense of Food* engages directly with the idea of "nutritionism," the idea that a food's value is based on its collective nutrients and vitamins (hence the rise in "whole grain" sugar cereals and diet sodas "fortified" with a day's supply of vitamins) and advocates for eating food that our ancestors would recognize as such; in other words, as close to its original form as possible. Pollan's campaign is not rooted in any particular political philosophy, but is rather a critique of modern agribusiness in service to an idealized vision of our agrarian past.

In 2009, novelist Jonathan Safran Foer published the nonfiction *Eating Animals*, in which he takes a philosophical approach to food culture and eating meat, visits CAFOs and commercial fisheries, and ultimately finds the titular practice unsustainable, unethical, and distasteful. He also takes Pollan to task for his failure to take an appropriate ethical stance in regards to eating meat. Foer argues that Pollan romanticizes

the animal-human relationship, anthropomorphizing chickens in a rhetorical attempt to avoid carrying his assertions to their natural conclusion: the family pet as dinner.

Perhaps the most visible contemporary attempt to emphasize the local is the Slow Food movement. Formed in Italy by Carlo Petrini in the late 1980s, Slow Food emerged from a protest of the opening of a McDonald's near the Spanish Steps in Rome. While the original protest objected to big business' growing global reach, the Slow Food movement has shaped its mission as a response to "the rise of fast food and fast life, the disappearance of local food traditions and people's dwindling interest in the food they eat, where it comes from, how it tastes and how our food choices affect the rest of the world."[13] The mandate of the international Slow Food organization is to marry "the pleasure of good food with a commitment to [the] community and the environment."[14] This includes seed banks to preserve heirloom cultivars; the Ark of Taste, which is an international catalogue of more than 500 at-risk foods and livestock; programs to preserve traditional methods of food preparation; informational campaigns against fast food and industrial agriculture; and lobbying against GMOs and pesticides. To date, Slow Food International has more than 100,000 members worldwide; Slow Food USA claimed 16,000 members in 2008. That same year, Alice Waters hosted Slow Food Nation, an event taking place over the Labor Day weekend featuring tastings, photo exhibits, and panels featuring Petrini and Michael Pollan, in San Francisco, California, and more than

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[13] "About Us." *Slow Food International*. Slow Food International, n.d. Web. 1 Aug 2011. <www.slowfood.com>.
[14] "Our Philosophy." *Slow Food International*. Slow Food International, Web. 2 Aug 2011. <http://www.slowfood.com/international/2/our-philosophy>.

50,000 people attended, which suggests a groundswell in a collective desire to be more in touch with our food, and to appreciate food as a "cornerstone of pleasure, culture, and community" (Slow Food USA).

As ethically and morally sound as the Slow Food movement appears to those who value pushing back against corporate control of the food supply, it is not without its problems. For example, Slow Food's emphasis on growing, cooking, and eating food that is "local, seasonal, and sustainably grown" may appear to be an uncomplicated sentiment, but such a prescription is remarkably unrealistic and classist in that it assumes a class and family dynamic that would allow for access to the time it takes to procure the food, prepare and serve it, not to mention the inevitable washing up after each meal. In fact, some feminists take issue with the Slow Food mandate, in that it communicates enhanced expectations of women, who still prepare 78% of meals eaten at home.[15] For women who work out of the home and also bear the responsibility of cooking for their families, as well as single-parent or single-income households, such an ideal is likely incompatible with the realities of day-to-day existence. While an in-depth analysis of the arguments for and against Slow Food is beyond the scope of this dissertation, ultimately, the choice to adopt these sustainable practices is deeply personal. People can incorporate what practices they can accommodate into their lifestyles and truly embrace the sense of pleasure and community afforded by slowing down. While there is certainly more joy and satisfaction to be found in a simple, home-cooked meal than processed food eaten out of

[15] See "NPD Study Finds More Men Cooking Than Ever Before," http://www.npd.com/press/releases/press_080325a.html.

a greasy bag, sometimes the greasy bag is the fastest and most affordable option, an indicator of the larger problems of the food supply system.

All of these entries into the canon of food discourse take as their project the practice of thinking critically and holistically about our food system and what it means for our culture, globalization, and the environment; they are also meant for a mainstream, popular, non-academic audience, and the authors and leaders come from the ranks of journalism, fiction, and filmmaking.[16] They speak to a growing distrust of and dissatisfaction with industrial food production and its myriad deleterious effects on health and the environment. They are also composed of a chorus of mostly white, male voices directed outward, projecting their concerns to a global stage. While this is a necessary and admirable strategy, because 78% of women still prepare the meals at home, I am concerned with the ways in which these problems are worked out within the gendered (female) domestic sphere and how these concerns are made manifest on a local level.

My project on the whole incorporates and contributes to the fairly young yet extensive field of feminist food studies in that I am concerned with similar issues and strategies. While my methodology is rooted in literary analysis in that I treat cookbooks and novels equally as literary texts, I have also included women's food blogs in my study. A number of critics within the field take as their topics the history of cookbooks, recipes, cooking culture, and the food industry through the lens of women's willful assertions of personhood, and all of its attendant joys and struggles. First and foremost is

[16] Schlosser and Pollan both enjoyed successful careers as investigative journalists prior to stepping into the arena of food-system reform. Kingsolver and Safran Foer built their names as novelists. Spurlock, Cheney, and Ellis were all unknown as filmmakers prior to their projects: Spurlock was a playwright and Cheney and Ellis had just graduated from Yale before making their respective documentaries.

Susan J. Leonardi's pioneering article, "Recipes for Reading: Summer Pasta, Lobster à la Riseholme and Key Lime Pie" (1989), in which she applied a feminist literary-critical approach to *The Joy of Cooking* (among other texts), arguing that the recipe represents an "embedded discourse" that serves as a valid narrative strategy (340). This assertion created a space in which critics could explore the various implications of cookbooks and food culture in general for women in terms of their gender, professional, and ethnic identities.

Three texts from this field in particular provide essential historical perspectives on women's roles in American food culture, both as shapers and consumers. Laura Shapiro's *Perfection Salad* (2001, 2008) is a historical survey of the domestic science experts of the late 19th and early 20th centuries and how their emphasis on scientific and hygienic cookery set the stage for the infiltration of homogenized corporate food into the American diet. She writes, "As advertising became a more crucial factor in the economics of magazine publishing, food columns increasingly reflected commercial interests, and scientific cookery itself settled comfortably into the service of the industry" (193). The "modernizing" effects of the mavens of scientific cookery, who praised the hygienic virtues of canned vegetables and potato flakes unsullied by human hands, opened up a space into which industry could insert itself into American women's kitchens. The result was a standardized and homogenized cultural palate and a vast market waiting to be plumbed.

This moment of industry's expanding reach into the kitchen as described in *Perfection Salad* anticipates Shapiro's follow-up study, *Something from the Oven:*

Reinventing Dinner in 1950s America (2005). In it, Shapiro examines the way that the American appetite was further shaped by the twin powers of industry, which had a surplus of food manufacturing technology in the wake of World War II, and advertising, which industry manipulated to create a need and demand for such foodstuffs as frozen TV dinners and cake mixes. Despite housewives' initial rejection of these products, they were eventually accepted into American kitchens. Barbara Haber, in *From Hardtack to Home Fries: An Uncommon History of American Cooks and Meals* (2002), uses her unique position as Curator of Books at Harvard's Schlesinger Library to trace women's participation in America's economic, social, political, and cultural history via historical cookbooks. Spanning the Irish famine to the development of the Harvey House restaurants to the heyday of *Gourmet* magazine, Haber's study makes the argument that not only can cookbooks reflect the *zeitgeist* of a culture, but also "reveal secrets about their owners" (209).

Anne L. Bower, Sherrie Inness, and Jessamyn Neuhaus take the significance of cookbooks as gendered texts with profound social, feminist, political, economic, and linguistic implications as their central concern, and all heavily inform my analysis, as articulated in the following review. In *Recipes for Reading: Community Cookbooks, Stories, Histories* (1997), Bower curates a collection of essays centered on late 19th- and early 20th century community cookbooks, which often emanated from churches or charities for fundraising purposes. "These texts seem innocent of narrative force," writes Bower in her introduction (1). Quite to the contrary, she argues, these cookbooks "comprise a genre containing […] stories [that] quietly or boldly tell of women's lives

and beliefs" (2). It was through the community cookbook, Bower argues, that women, marginalized within their contemporary cultural contexts by the virtue of their gender (and in the case of *The Black Family Dinner Quilt Cookbook*, their race), found a way to build community while also participating in American public life (20). The essays collected in *Recipes for Reading* help to situate women, via these cookbooks, within their cultural, political, and moral landscapes, bringing their various values — from expressions of local culture to philanthropic concerns to civil rights legislation — as communities and as individuals into relief. Similarly, the texts represented in my study undertake similar projects, albeit with a common goal: to articulate their power as citizens rather than as consumers via a discourse of food.

In *Dinner Roles: American Woman and Culinary Culture* (2001), Inness argues that cookbooks, along with other media, "reveal the dreams of an era […] the media's representation of cooking and women illuminates a great deal about mainstream American society and its assumptions about women's societally desirable roles" (12). So, just as today's fashion magazines enforce an unattainable standard of physical beauty thanks to the wonders of Photoshop, so did cookbooks in the first half of the twentieth century promote an idealized vision of appropriate gender roles for both men and women. Inness' thesis is, essentially, that cookbooks functioned as conduct texts that perpetuated the notion of the kitchen as an inherently female space, from with which the white, middle-class woman would cook the foods that attracted a man and kept him happy. This

notion of cooking as women's work persists, even among those who argue that Slow Food and locavore practices create more work for women.[17]

Similarly, Neuhaus traces how cookbooks and cookbook rhetoric helped to reinforce gender norms, bringing into relief the way that the food industry, whether appliance manufacturers or food companies, trained women how to be women according to culturally sanctioned gender norms, effectively functioning as conduct texts, and arguably the precursors of contemporary lifestyle portals, for an increasingly industrialized nation. In *Manly Meals and Mom's Home Cooking: Cookbooks and Gender in Modern America* (2003), she writes,

> Authors often infuse their pages with instructions on the best way to live one's life – how to shop, lose weight, feed children, combat depression, protect the environment, expand one's horizons, and make a house a home. Cookbooks thus reveal the recipes for living created by authors, editors, cookery experts, and corporations in the past. (1)

Neuhaus demonstrates the rhetorical techniques used by cookbooks produced from the 1890s to the 1960s to encourage women to seek the domestic sphere out of a sense of duty to both her family and her country. For example, a woman as skilled turn-of-the-century household manager ensured her husband's ability to perform in the workplace (16); a woman who effectively and patriotically planted a victory garden or cleverly stretched her rationed staples helped American troops do their jobs more effectively

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[17] See Jeffrey, Jennifer. "The Feminist in my Kitchen, Part 2." *Jennifer Jeffrey, Writer & Editor*. Typepad.com, 28 June 2007. Web. 2 Aug 2011. <http://jenniferjeffrey.typepad.com/writer/2007/06/the-feminist-in.html>.

during World War II (25); and the homemaker who deployed her culinary savvy in purchasing pre-made food products was doing her duty as a good postwar middle-class consumer (30). Indeed, Neuhaus returns to the trope of a woman's duty again and again, arguing the various ways in which cookbook instructions are couched in a rhetoric of duty shaped by historical and cultural contexts. This analysis informs my approach to my readings of the Bloodroot and Post Punk Kitchen (PPK) cookbooks in Chapter Two, in that Bloodroot operates out of an entirely different kind of duty, almost Transcendentalist in its separatist approach, but informed by a second-wave feminist ethos and in the service of a feminist ecology. By contrast, the PPK cookbooks, while not overtly speaking of duty, inject a sustained definition of veganism and its virtues into a narrative of pleasurable foods. Through turning this discourse of duty on its head, both sets of cookbooks push up against what Neuhaus sees as the cultural enforcement of consumerism and gender norms within the logos of the cookbook.

At the same time, Neuhaus points out that the driving force behind much of this rhetoric was the food industry: "Food conglomerates, rather than zealous reformers, had a vested interest in endorsing the same diet and cookery habits for the entire nation" (35). In this way, the standardized, corporate-produced cookbook that trains women how to cook standardized foods using mass-produced ingredients, while deploying a pedagogical approach rooted in close-up photographs of certain techniques and couched in a chatty, "just pals" tone sets the stage for industry to expand its reach to the deepest corners of the pantry.

Arlene Voski Akavian and Barbara Haber situate this infiltration of industry into the kitchen at the beginning of a trajectory of feminist food studies in the edited collection, *From Betty Crocker to Feminist Food Studies* (2005). The title of the collection is suggestive of its overall project, which is to chart the history of women's cultural relationship to food beginning with "The Marketplace," which contends with the specters of Betty Crocker and the Gerber baby in the woman's role of feeding her family. After providing historical contexts, the collection moves on to "Representations" and "Resistances," which contribute to Avakian and Haber's argument that there is, indeed, a place in women's studies and feminist scholarship for the study of food and women's relationship to all things food-related. The interdisciplinary collection addresses

> [H]ow the food industry constructs who does what in the kitchen, for whom, with what ingredients, and on what appliances; how in their food practices women resist oppression through racism, colonialism, and globalization; how women survive starvation conditions; how ethnicity intersects with gender, race, and class through cooking, serving, and eating food; how food practices are implicated in the construction of American whiteness; how we may be complicit in racialized gender constructions as consumers of both food and representations of gender and food. (viii)

The collection is useful to my project in that many essays bring together the same intersections with which I am concerned: gender, ethnicity, diaspora, class, and women's labor, thereby holding in tension the global with the local. For example, where Sharmila Sen is concerned with the ways in which food acts as a form of ethnic representation

("Indian Spices across the Black Waters"), Laura Lindenfeld examines the transgressive figure of the fat woman who rejects gender norms via consumption of food ("Women Who Eat Too Much: Femininity and Food in *Fried Green Tomatoes*").

Perhaps the collection's most useful contribution to my project is Alice P. Julier's "Hiding Gender and Race in the Discourse of Commercial Food Consumption." In it, Julier notes that the discourse of women and food is often separate from more global concerns in the world of food studies. Her aim is to question, "what happens if we consider race and gender structural sets of arrangements that simultaneously operate to position people, construct meanings, and determine activities in relation to food" (164). Julier's most powerful assertion comes near the end of the essay, and it provides the guiding mandate for my project. She writes, "It seems essential that studies of food and social life must explore how gender and race and class collide to create both the local and the global [and that] such research would focus on how specific food behaviors and roles regarding commensality are given gendered and racial meanings" (180). In my attempt to uncover the ways that women attempt to "only connect" via food and commensality, I contend with this very collision of gender, race, and class and its various iterations across my entire project. I also attempt to engage with the ways in which gender and race structure my texts' approach to relationships, communities, and representations.

I do not mean to imply that at the time of Julier's writing that race and ethnicity were absent from the landscape of feminist food studies; indeed, race and ethnicity factor prominently in the prolific Sherrie Inness' two collections in 2001: *Kitchen Culture in America: Popular Representations of Food, Gender, and Race* and *Pilaf, Pozole, and*

Pad Thai: American Women and Ethnic Food. The project of *Kitchen Culture* (2001a) is to demonstrate the ways that food (its procurement, preparation, consumption, etc) shapes the lives of women with respect to their race, class, and ethnicity, as well as their positionality as it regards the way that food is marketed and advertised. Inness defines "kitchen culture" as "the various discourses about food, cooking and gender roles that stem from the kitchen but that pervade our society on many levels" (3), and the essays comprising this collection reflect that definition of the term quite precisely. In Inness' second 2001 collection, *Pilaf, Pozole, and Pad Thai* (2001b), she argues that ethnic foods are a complex cultural language, often commodified by American culture. She then invites the reader to think critically about his or her relationship to the ethnic foods they consume; the essays in the collection provide a variety of critical lenses with which to do so. Three essays from each collection stand out as particularly salient interventions related to my project; together they help me to theorize the ways in which my texts, particularly those in Chapter Three, situate their subjects in a localized space, the kitchen, but informed by a cosmopolitan perspective. These subjects find themselves tasked with a different kind of representation, one that is rooted in translation: of culture, of self, of relationship to community. They tell their stories through the food that they cook and the recipes that they write. Their various projects, however, are fraught with danger, in that they run the risk of capitulating to a hegemonic, colonialist demand to present idealized, fetishized, or essentialized images of the ethnic woman in the service of developing a diasporic *écriture feminine*.[18]

[18] For example, the longsuffering ethnic mother who serves as an expert native informant regarding the

From *Kitchen Culture*, Alice A. Deck's "'Now Then – Who Said Biscuits?': The Black Woman Cook as Fetish in American Advertising, 1905-1953" is an incisive examination of the "idealized representations of the black cook as fetishism" (70) in advertisements for flour and other baking supplies published between 1905 and 1953. Along similar lines, Janet Theophano argues in "Home Cooking" that women writers can and do use cookbooks as "vehicle[s] for constructing, defending, and transgressing social and cultural borders" (139), expressing their cultural identities through transmission of recipes. The cookbook, Theophano concludes, is not only a bridge between cultures, but also a nostalgic exercise, an attempt to reclaim a past irretrievably lost. But in the writing, the author translates herself, her culture, and that culture's food for her intended audience. Finally, Traci Marie Kelly's "'If I Were a Voodoo Priestess': Women's Culinary Autobiographies" surveys three categories of women's culinary autobiography, the culinary memoir, the autobiographical cookbook, and the autoethnographic cookbook. In it, she argues that if the recipe is not indexed in the book, the author gives primacy to the story, rather than the recipe. In other words, if the recipe is not indexed, the intention is not for the book to be used in the kitchen. Kelly explains that "[t]he recipe is part of a deep description, a Proustian gesture (from the viewpoint of the cook), wherein the reader can read the recipe, imagine the cooking, but then keep reading" (256); this idea helps me to theorize the meaning of the *logos* of the recipes and the relevance of their placement within the texts I analyze in Chapters Three and Four.

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cultural norms, mores, and cuisines of the homeland.

In "Los Chilaquiles de mi 'ama": The Language of Everyday Cooking," Meredith E. Abarca provides an overview and analysis of oral histories/ethnographies of her family's cooking traditions and applies her reading of those ethnographies to Chicana cooking in general. She states that cooking is a means by which women outside of the academy or without academy-sanctioned platforms for expression use food as the mechanism for expression, imbuing food with their own creative agency or personal twist on a recipe, their *chiste*, which is informed by their unique positionalities (for example, one of Abarca's informants calls her chilaquiles "lo comida de uno de pobre," the food of we the poor; Abarca 71). In this way, she asserts that cooking is a sort of *écriture féminine*, which is a useful perspective to apply to my own readings of Indian women's writing and cooking, especially with Malladi's *Serving Crazy With Curry*, which is so explicitly engaged with the act of narrating the self via the recipe form, with a profound movement from the migrant mother's attepmpt to effectively narrate herself in writing or via food to the first-generation daughter who is able to mine her Western experiences and resources to develop her own unique way of culinary self-representation.

With "'In the Kitchen Family Bread Is Always Rising!': Women's Culture and the Politics of Food," Benay Blend looks at how ethnic women writers use cooking as a metaphor for writing. To reproduce a recipe is to retell a story, and that depends on negotiating a complex set of personal-community relationships. Ethnic women (in this case, Native American and Chicana) writers use the "culinary metaphor" as a "discourse of resistance in which the self in relation to an ethnic group is empowered" (162). I see this gesture taking place across Chapter Three, from Ashima's authoring of a living,

diasporic cuisine via learning to make shortcuts in her cooking (Lahiri 2003) to the more overt gestures undertaken by Devi (Malladi 2007), who tells the story of first-generation Indian American-ness via recipes like blueberry curry. "Let's Cook Thai: Recipes for Colonialism" by Lisa Heldke is concerned with "cultural food colonialism" (which she also terms "food adventuring"). In this particular essay, Heldke examines ethnic cookbooks and how they aid the food adventurer in her subconscious colonial quest, which manifests itself in a constant search for novel cuisine. She argues that the food adventurer's familiarity with ethnic/novel/Other cuisine lends her an air of authenticity that functions as a form of cultural capital, in that a facility in the kitchen with "bizarre" or "Other" foods lends the Western home cook an air of worldliness.[19] I use Heldke's observations here with an eye toward how *The Hindi-Bindi* club plays into the desires of the food adventurer, in that the cultural pedagogy embedded in the text serves to reify the ethnic mother in the service of narrating the diasporic experience while evoking the "sights, sounds, and smells (recipes included) of a vibrant Indian culture."[20]

Moving beyond Sherrie Inness' collections, the project of Donna Gabaccia's *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans* (2000) is to examine the roots of the "homogenous" American diet and tease out the "foreign" and ethnic influences on America's ever-changing foodways. Over the course of her discussion, Gabaccia makes connections between immigration and culinary nationalism, culminating in the argument that "there have been no new food fights recently." Meaning, our culture

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[19] See Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Boston, MA: Harvard UP. 1984.
[20] Wilkinson, Joanne. "Review of *The Hindi-Bindi Club*." *Booklist*. 106.16 (2007): 23. Print.

is so accustomed to "eating the Other" that we are more concerned with commodifying and industrializing ethnic foods like canned spaghetti and bulk tubs of hummus rather than attempting to force immigrant communities to conform to a particularly "American" way of eating; the result of this commodification, however, is the same as forcing a newly arrived ethnic group to adopt an "American" diet. When hummus emerges from the migrant enclaves and onto the shelves at warehouse clubs in four-pound tubs, it is stripped of its ethnic identity and absorbed into the American body and cultural consciousness. I extend this idea to the realm of diasporic Indian texts in my consideration what is at stake in presenting diasporic Indian concerns via the culinary idiom. The consequences of such a relationship could be that the samosa does ultimately occupy the same imaginary space as the Hot Pocket for the American consumer.

The Story of the Stories

I have organized my chapters so that they represent a narrative continuum: on one end of this continuum, we have an unquestioned embrace of Big Food and its products. From there, I organize my texts as they represent a turning away from corporate food in favor of foods that enable women to articulate their identities as individuals and in relation to communities, arguing for the power of connection in the face of a homogenizing, globalized cuisine. For some, this is a fully articulated and complete turning away; for others, it is a subtle resistance in which Big Food is the unnamed Other that is quietly rejected in favor of local relationships. My hope is that through my analyses, I demonstrate the various ways in which women are able to discern themselves

as discrete subjects in relation to local communities rather than anonymous consumers of mass-produced foods.

In Chapter One, **"Blogging Big Food: Betty Crocker 3.0,"** I examine three popular female-authored food blogs: *The Pioneer Woman*, *Gluten-Free Girl and the Chef*, and *Fed Up With Lunch*. *The Pioneer Woman* is, in many ways, dedicated to the various ways that women can consume, from cake mixes to KitchenAid mixers to pricey silk blouses to expensive homeschooling supplies. I argue that the image of the Pioneer Woman, like Betty Crocker, is a self-fashioned living trademark for the digital age, available at all times to reassure and reinforce the homemaker's tastes and abilities; the difference is that the Pioneer Woman is a brand in and of herself. Similarly, Shauna James Ahern, the blogger behind *Gluten-Free Girl*, has developed a complicated relationship with packaged foods and corporate branding. As a result, Ahern's intimate relationship with her readership community is often compromised by her need to answer to the money-generating operations of her blog. Finally, *Fed Up With Lunch*, authored by Sarah Burns Wu, a Chicago-area schoolteacher who blogged pseudonymously as Mrs. Q, is rooted in an urge to inspire local, grassroots action in readers' communities rather than to merely exist within the insular space of an Internet commenting forum.

Chapter Two, **"'We wanted a new recipe altogether': Feminist Vegetarian Ideologies,"** witnesses a turn away from Big Food on the part of two vegetarian and vegan establishments in order to advance their ideological platforms. I examine two cookbooks published by the Connecticut-based Bloodroot, a feminist vegetarian restaurant and bookstore whose cookbooks are not simply feminist screeds disguised as

recipes; rather, they are tangible representations of a living, dynamic community of feminists who believe that to remove themselves from the mainstream culture is to create the kind of world they would like to live in. Similarly, the authors of the Post-Punk Kitchen cookbooks, Isa Chandra Moskowitz and Terry Hope Romero, employ a punk rock, DIY ethos to represent veganism in the interest of undermining the insidious practices and effects of Big Food.

Chapter Three, **"My Own Private India: Recipes for Diasporic Identities,"** centers on three novels written by diasporic Indian women with an eye toward what is accomplished in terms of negotiating Big Food within a fictionalized culinary narrative; all three texts focus heavily on the relationships between and among recipes, cooking, and diasporic identity while holding in tension the characters' physical presence in their American homes and their psychological links to their originary home of India.

Finally, Chapter Four, **"The Novel Cookbook: Communities, Narratives, Recipes, and Women's Literature,"** is an extension of Chapter Three's concentration on the fictionalized culinary narrative. In it, I examine the much more formalized hybrid genre of the novel cookbook — that is, a novel with recipes embedded as part of the narrative — to discover the ways in which the private exchange of recipes within the space of the novel opens up opportunities for women to reveal previously secret and possibly transgressive information. In this chapter, I analyze the ways in which embedded recipes help to construct counternarratives of femininity that render communities of women — even communities as small as two women — visible, while again holding the local and the global in tension with one another.

* * *

As I have mentioned, my aim in writing this dissertation is to interrogate diverse textual representations of women's attempts to "only connect" with themselves and their communities via resistances to the hegemony of Big Food. These resistances engage with an array of high-stakes political and cultural concerns, including but not limited to bodily health, gender norms, children's welfare, human rights, the environment, conspicuous consumption, and globalization. In addition to extending the discourse of feminist food studies into areas not previously contended with, "Starting From Scratch" examines the way in which women have managed to transform cooking, a deeply gendered practice, into a deeply politicized act while also celebrating the simple pleasures of preparing and eating food. What is on the menu for these women? Dinner … and everything else.

CHAPTER 1:

Betty Crocker 3.0: Blogging Big Food, Cultivating Trust

"One of the best ways a woman can express her personality is through the foods she serves." – Ann Pillsbury[21]

In October 2010, the BlogHer network hosted its second annual Food conference in the posh InterContinental Hotel in downtown San Francisco.[22] The conference served as a way for women bloggers to network, sample products, watch cooking demonstrations, and learn and talk about the various aspects of food blogging.[23] As part of their conference fee of $300, attendees received breakfast and lunch on Friday, breakfast on Saturday, two sponsor-hosted cocktail parties, and an excursion to the Ferry Building to visit the farmers' market there.[24] The two-day conference was broken into five sessions, and each session was divided into four different "tracks" or topic areas:

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[21] Shapiro, Laura. "Betty Crocker and the Woman in the Kitchen." *From Betty Crocker to Feminist Food Studies: Critical Perspectives on Women and Food*. Ed. Arlene Voski Akavian and Barbara Haber. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005. Print.

[22] BlogHer started out as a conference dedicated to women and blogging in 2005; the response was so overwhelming that the three founders founded an LLC. The BlogHer site aggregates women's blogs from around the Internet, and the company also runs an ad network. The larger annual conference spawned smaller ones, including BlogHer Food, which focuses on food blogging and related concerns, from SEO to urban homesteading. In September 2011, BlogHer hosted the first annual BlogHer Handmade in Minneapolis, Minnesota; this conference was devoted to craft bloggers, but also included a food component.

[23] Blogging emerged out of the early-1990s practice of online journaling. From the early online-diary oriented sites like Diaryland and Blogger emerged single-topic outlets such as *Talking Points Memo* and *Wonkette*, dedicated to political coverage not included in mainstream media. By the mid-2000s, blogging had been widely adopted by corporations, politicians, and everyday people and the term "blogosphere," which describes the Internet-wide community of blogs, was born. There are dozens, if not hundreds, of blogging genres, from personal diaries, to "mommy" blogs, gossip, fashion, photography, travel, music and cooking blogs (to list just a few). Blogs have become so influential in the 21st century zeitgeist as to result in full-time blogging careers and book deals for some authors; blogs also tend to foment discord between bloggers and traditional journalists. Many critics of blog culture claim that the rushed nature of blogging results in misinformation and a populace unwilling or unable to discern facts from hastily published gossip.

[24] Kraft Foods (and, by extension, its parent company, ConAgra) was the primary sponsor of BlogHer Food, with smaller sponsorships from Pepperidge Farms, Cuties, ScharffenBerger chocolates, and others.

Values, Visuals, Vocation, and Voice, allowing attendees to explore topics such as urban farming, blogger ethics, recipe writing, food photography, and effective SEO (search engine optimization) to drive traffic to their blogs.

Many of the panelists featured in these various sessions, especially the ones dedicated to professionalizing a blog, can be considered "influencers": bloggers who have a presence across social media – primarily Twitter and Facebook – and who serve as a conduit for companies to market their products. Among these influencers is Ree Drummond, the author of *The Pioneer Woman* (thepioneerwoman.com), a wildly popular blog that is the commodified narrative of an Oklahoma ranch wife whose blogging ethos is predicated on the promise of "keepin' it real." Drummond spoke on two "Voice" panels dedicated to maintaining one's voice across various platforms and to cultivating and maintaining an online community. Another blogging "influencer" is Shauna James Ahern of *Gluten-Free Girl and the Chef* (glutenfreegirl.com). Ahern, who began blogging her experience of following a gluten-free diet after being diagnosed with celiac disease in 2005, has helmed a grassroots movement of sorts to make celiac and gluten-free living more visible while simultaneously charting the trajectory of her personal life, from diagnosis to marriage to parenthood. Because of her deeply personal food blogging, she was invited to participate in the closing keynote panel, titled "The Soul, Passion and Heart of a Chef," along with fellow bloggers Molly Wizenberg (orangette.blogspot.com) and Michael Ruhlman (ruhlman.com). Also featured at BlogHer Food '10 was Mrs. Q of *Fed Up With Lunch* (fedupwithlunch.com), one of four panelists at a modestly attended Friday afternoon Values panel called "Our Food Future: Kids, Cooking and Health." The

panel discussion covered such topics as teaching children how to cook, limiting children's packaged food consumption (or finding acceptable alternatives to mainstream options), and school lunch reform. *Fed Up With Lunch: The School Lunch Project* is the ambitious undertaking of a then-anonymous Midwestern schoolteacher who decided to eat school lunch every day in 2010 and document it online in an effort to advocate for improving the quality of lunches in public schools.

I take these three blogs and their authors under analysis in this chapter with an eye toward interrogating the ways in which they mediate Big Food, the way they position themselves in relation to hegemony, and the implications of those representations for the blogs' perceived projects of connection between the authors and their readership communities. If they are indeed "influencers," whom are they influencing and what is at stake in such a relationship with their readers? I situate these bloggers on a continuum, with Pioneer Woman embracing Big Food via a mediated image along the lines of Betty Crocker, while Ahern advocates a turn away from Big Food for dietary reasons while at the same time cultivating a very complicated relationship with packaged food and, by extension, her devoted community of readers. Where these two bloggers exploit their readership communities in service to building a brand, conversely, Mrs. Q encourages her readers to consider the broader implications of what is being served in their local school cafeterias (or what is going into children's lunch boxes), reading school lunch against the wider context of the industrial food system. In so doing, she advocates for the personhood of the disadvantaged children eating the lunches in question, arguing that they deserve both better food and a voice in the discourse of our food system.

Keepin' It Real: A Case Study in Marketing Authenticity to Women

Ree Drummond began writing her blog, *The Pioneer Woman*, in May 2006, as a way to share family photos and updates with far-flung relations. In the early days of the blog, Drummond posted unprocessed photographs of her children, vignettes of her life in Los Angeles, informal poetry, "cowboy colloquialisms," and vintage photographs of cowgirl-themed pinups. In five years' time, it has become an extremely polished lifestyle portal,[25] with sections dedicated to "Confessions," a collection of daily life vignettes from anecdotes about an unwanted visit from a snake, to a prairie fire, to descriptions of the wild horses the Drummond ranch houses on behalf of the Federal Bureau of Land Management.[26] Other sections include "Cooking"; "Photography," featuring processing tips, contests, tutorials, and occasional "Edit This!" and other user-submitted competitions; and "Home and Garden," which features product recommendations, gift ideas, and hotel room tours gleaned from Drummond's various site-related travels. Perhaps the most controversial section is "Homeschooling," which has two regular outside contributors that share homeschooling techniques, product reviews and resources for homeschoolers, essays, and vocabulary quizzes with prizes such as iPads and

[25] I gesture here to similar "gracious living" clearinghouses fronted by celebrities such as MarthaStewart.com, which serves as a resource center for recipes, crafting ideas, gardening tips, entertaining, and, of course, shopping. Other examples include Gwyneth Paltrow's GOOP (goop.com) and RachaelRay.com.

[26] The Bureau of Land Management's Mustang management program has generated no small amount of controversy. Some critics assert that it constitutes wasteful government spending to pay ranchers like Ladd Drummond millions of dollars every year to house wild mustangs on their land. Others take issue with the annual roundup of wild mustangs and burros, which are then either adopted out, transferred to long-term holding facilities like Drummond's, or euthanized, arguing that it is inhumane.

Amazon.com gift certificates.[27] A recipe-sharing offshoot of the cooking section of *The Pioneer Woman* is *Tasty Kitchen* (http://thepioneerwoman.com/tasty-kitchen/), which features user-generated recipes and recipe reviews. The story of how she met and married her husband, whom she calls "Marlboro Man," was serialized in 40 installments in the "Confessions" section of the blog in 2007; it was published in novel form on February 1, 2011.

While Pioneer Woman is not a dedicated food blog — indeed, it is very much a lifestyle blog and Drummond very much a personality along the lines of Sandra Lee or Rachael Ray[28] — the "Pioneer Woman Cooks" section is what has garnered her the most attention. Drummond posted her first recipe, a step-by-step guide to cooking a steak, on May 30, 2007. This step-by-step photographic instruction method has become her trademark for every recipe; the intended purpose of this method is to demystify the process of cooking for those who are uncomfortable in the kitchen. This model has proven extremely popular, as *Pioneer Woman* receives 13 million hits per month and is

[27] Many of Pioneer Woman's detractors question her claims as to whether she homeschools her children herself or relies on an invisible-to-the-reader staff to assist her in this particular endeavor.

[28] Sandra Lee is a Food Network personality who hosts a program called *Semi-Homemade*, in which she demonstrates recipes that are 70% prepackaged foods and 30% fresh ingredients, as well as constructing "tablescapes" and suggesting cocktail pairings with the semi-homemade meals. Rachael Ray is also a Food Network personality who has hosted *30 Minute Meals*, *$40 a Day*, *Rachael Ray's Tasty Travels*, and the syndicated lifestyle show *Rachael Ray*, all aimed at middle-American consumers. Both women have been criticized for their methodologies and for disingenuous promises. Lee is widely derided among the culinary set, with *The New York Times* food writer Amanda Hesser dismissing Lee's methodology as "faux cooking" ("Test Kitchen: Homemade or Semi? A Bake-Off," October 1, 2000). Ray has been criticized for not including preparation time in her promise of simple meals that take 30 minutes to make, as well as for failing to tip service personnel on her *$40 a Day* travel show, in which she purported to dine in a city for $40 a day.

on Technorati's[29] list of the top 100 most influential blogs.[30] From that first recipe in late May 2007, *Pioneer Woman* went on to win "Best Food Blog" in the 2008 Bloggies; her cookbook, *The Pioneer Woman Cooks*, was published in the fall of 2009, and Drummond appeared on the Today Show in December 2010 on a feature dedicated to cinnamon rolls (she posted her first of many cinnamon-roll-centric posts on June 1, 2007; one might even argue that cinnamon rolls are Ree Drummond's signature dish). In this chapter, I trace the arc of Ree Drummond from the author of a small personal blog to a staggeringly popular mediated Internet personality that, through her connections to the industrial food chain, a consumerist blogging ethos that employs conversational marketing, and reliance on convenience foods, serves to mediate Big Food much the same way that Betty Crocker did in the postwar era.

Laura Shapiro (2005) describes the genesis of "live trademarks" in 1950s America that saw the rise of fictional female characters serving as home economics advisors to befuddled housewives. These contrived home economists included Mary Blake for Carnation Evaporated Milk, Chiquita Banana of United Fruit, Mary Alden and Aunt Jemima of Quaker Oats (which bought Aunt Jemima Pancake Mix in 1925), and, of course, Betty Crocker of General Mills.[31] These characters "were designed to project

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[29] Technorati is a is a search engine that aggregates and indexes more than 100 million English-language blogs and rates individual blogs' "authority," an indicator of how many times that blog has been linked to from other unique blogs in the previous six months. While this is but one outpost that helps determine any given blog's popularity, it is remarkable that, according to Technorati's authority rubric, The Pioneer Woman blog was among the top 100 blogs out of the 100 million in Technorati's index.

[30] Lynch, Rene. "The Pioneer Woman, an Internet and publishing sensation." *Los Angeles Times* 23 September 2009. Web. 22 Feb 2011. <http://www.latimes.com/features/food/la-fo-pioneer23-2009sep23,0,623229.story>.

[31] Shapiro 179

specific, carefully researched characteristics to women shopping for their households. 'Ideally, the corporate character is a woman, between the ages of 32 and 40, attractive but not competitively so, mature but youthful-looking, competent yet warm, understanding but not sentimental, interested in the consumer but not involved with her'" (30). The image of Betty Crocker was crafted by General Mills in response to countless housewives writing in needing troubleshooting tips and advice for baking cakes, pies, and biscuits; "The company saw this as a good chance to communicate with customers, so home economists on staff answered every letter, signing them all 'Betty Crocker'" (32). Some might argue that in addition to serving as the genesis of the live trademark, Betty Crocker was also the mother of conversation marketing, in which a company strikes up a social relationship with the consumer. [32] With that relationship came increased trust and, naturally, increased sales:

> General Mills could see that Betty Crocker was unparalleled when it came to reaching homemakers and building trust in the company. The phenomenal success of *Betty Crocker's Picture Cook Book*, published in 1950 with a then record-breaking first printing of nearly a million copies, showed just how much home cooks wanted the simply phrased reassurance and reliable advice they associated with her name. (34)

Betty Crocker is best known today as the symbolic figure on the cake-mix box, although Adelaide Cummings portrayed her from 1949-1964 in Betty's various television

[32] See "Word of mouse." *Economist* 8 November 2007: n. pag. Web. 24 Feb 2011. http://www.economist.com/node/10102992 and "A Look into Conversation Marketing." *Brandswag*. 2 June 2010. Web. 24 Feb 2011. http://www.getbrandswag.com/a-look-into-conversation-marketing/ for discussions of how conversation marketing is deployed online.

appearances, delivering the carefully mediated combination of sentiment, empathy, authority, and references to General Mills products for which her constructed image had become known. Ultimately, Betty's job was to demystify the process of cooking via emphasizing convenience items like cake mixes, enabling women to unchain themselves from the kitchen while continuing to lovingly provide their families with homemade foods.

Similarly, Ree Drummond, the Pioneer Woman, is a mediated image[33] dedicated to helping people who are uncomfortable in the kitchen discover a love of cooking via her step-by-step instructional cooking entries. She shares stories of embarrassment and silly behavior, offers up gift suggestions, hosts giveaways of expensive items paid for by revenue generated by the site, and promotes a community of sameness that invites the reader to identify with the Pioneer Woman's foibles. Only in this case, the brand behind the living trademark is the Pioneer Woman herself.

And yet, this has not always been the case with the Pioneer Woman. Where the blogger named Ree Drummond, writing in 2006 and 2007, frequently uses mild profanity;[34] writes long, revealing entries in which she shares disturbing or humorous episodes from her past; and describes herself as a "malcontented, angst-ridden desperate

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[33] I take my definition of this term from Richard Dyer, who argues in *Stars* (1998) that the Hollywood studio system manufactured star images that bore little resemblance to celebrities' real lives but bore considerable weight in the public's response to a film. The purpose of these images, mediated by a film studio's public relations machinations, was (and is, to some degree) create a product – the star – with sustained selling power.

[34] From May 2006 to August 2007, Drummond's blog was titled "Confessions of a Pioneer Woman" and was hosted on the Typepad blogging platform at pioneerwoman.typepad.com. She started "The Pioneer Woman Cooks!" as a second blog at thepioneerwomancooks.com. On September 1, 2007, Drummond merged both blogs at thepioneerwoman.com.

housewife" (May 12, 2006), the blogger known as The Pioneer Woman writes pithy, self-deprecating entries that follow an established formula and adhere to a consistently breezy tone. However, because the archives of the blog's early days are still relatively intact,[35] readers can piece together a very different portrait of Ree Drummond, separate from the highly polished, mediated image of the Pioneer Woman of today. The poetry, a series Drummond titled "Poetry of a Madwoman" and presented in "volumes," is surprisingly candid and evocative. For example, "Volume 7," published May 12, 2006, reads,

> I'm a pool of flesh.
>
> A puddle of exhaustion on the dirty tile floor.
>
> I can't get up.
>
> I've fallen and I can't get up.
>
> I have no button on a chain around my neck
>
> With which to summon help.
>
> Would that I did so I could be whisked away
>
> In an ambulance.
>
> Sirens blaring.
>
> People staring.
>
> I'd ask them to drop me off at a hotel.
>
> Room service.
>
> Maid service.

[35] A notable exception being Drummond's references to her intellectually challenged sibling as "Mike, My Retarded Brother." For an example, see Drummond, Ree. "I Want to See Your Faces." *Confessions of a Pioneer Woman*. Typepad.com, 11 June 2007. Web. 22 Feb 2011. <http://pioneerwoman.typepad.com/confessions_of_a_pioneer_/2007/06/i_want_to_see_y.html >.

Laundry service.

Two days of this heaven

And I'd muster the strength to carry on. Until next month.

Here Drummond expresses a deep sense of fatigue stemming from her duties as a housewife and mother and evokes the pathos of the Life Alert medical protection system commercials that feature feeble elderly people in dangerous positions after falling down. Unlike the people in the commercial, the enfeebled-by-housework Drummond does not have the safety net provided by the electronic assistance alert, and has no one to help her. She expresses a desire to spend two days alone in a hotel where there are staff to assume the duties she is responsible for on a daily basis: cooking, cleaning, and laundry. The underlying mood is that of a woman dissatisfied and exhausted by the grueling and repetitive duties incumbent upon her as a stay-at-home mother. While the tone is somewhat wry, the subtext is that the work of the housewife is Sisyphean and thankless.

A few days later, "Volume 9" (May 22, 2006) reveals a similar dissatisfaction with her body:

I'm fat

So very fat.

These thirteen bastard pounds

Cling to my gut

Like a marsupial suckling.

My thin, shapely legs

Are mankind's greatest deception.

Just travel north a foot or two

And a blubbery hell awaits.

Bring me cheese.

Fresh mozzarella cheese.

And chocolate by the load.

I'm nothing but a toad.

I'm fat.

Here Drummond ventriloquizes the self-loathing women are expected to express when they carry excess weight, and humorously expresses the tension between feeling anxious about that extra weight and wanting to feed that anxiety with chocolate and cheese. This stands in contrast to the self-deprecating tone Drummond takes in regard to her love handles and jiggly arms in her mediated "Pioneer Woman" image. After publishing this poem, Drummond embarked on a Slim-Fast regimen to shed her extra pounds; while on this diet, she published an entry recalling a previous experience with the diet while "accidentally-unexpectedly-devastatingly-tragically"[36] pregnant with her fourth child; that entry describes how instead of continuing to replace breakfast with a Slim-Fast shake, she was not only consuming twice the normal portion of Slim-Fast (with full-fat milk), but also supplementing her shake with a second breakfast, which led to weight gain she was not anticipating. When she complained to her husband, he observed her habits and declares that she has been on "full feed" for the first few months of her

[36] Drummond, Ree. "Slim Fast and Livestock Comparisons." *The Pioneer Woman*. 23 May 2006. Web. 22 Feb 2011. <http://thepioneerwoman.com/blog/2006/05/slim_fast_and_l/>.

pregnancy. She writes, "I was a cow on full feed. I'd been plumping myself up for slaughter. My kitchen was my feed yard. I was well on my way to the meat packer. I cried" ("Slim Fast and Livestock Comparisons," May 23, 2006).

This vignette is meant to be a humorous, embarrassing tale of dieting mishaps, but it also reveals Drummond's attitude toward her situation, having found herself "tragically" pregnant with her fourth child; indeed, both the poem's juxtaposition of nursing imagery with words like "deceit" and "hell," and the Slim-Fast story express a deep ambivalence or even antipathy toward motherhood. She accepts her husband's comparison to the cow being plumped for slaughter, aligning herself with the passivity of feedlot livestock destined to become the American consumer's hamburger.[37] Her acceptance of this comparison and acknowledgment that she was headed to certain doom reveals her attitude toward pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood. The following day, Drummond announced on her blog that she lost another pound, declaring, "Skinniness (happiness) here I come!" This attitude reflects a capitulation to the hegemonic conflation of thinness and happiness that permeates Western culture, and helps to establish Ree Drummond as a real, kvetching person with everyday problems.

Another way in which Drummond's early writing skews toward a more intimate ethos and gestures toward painful feelings is when she explains that her family is not supportive of her interest in photography:

[37] This was perhaps a prescient observation, given that as of this writing in February 2011, Drummond as Pioneer Woman is most definitely a commodity to be consumed.

> My daily life is bursting with repetition and routine. Every day, I make the same beds, pick up the same (dang) toys, and utter the same admonitions to my children. The laundry I put away yesterday is back in the hamper today. That's fine. But when the perfect light of evening appears, all I want to do is run outside with my camera and find different ways of looking at ordinary things. ("I like close-ups," May 25, 2006)

For Drummond, photography provides both an escape from the drudgery of her daily life and a creative outlet. These posts, which are now archived in the "Confessions" section of the site, portray a woman who struggles with her transition to life as a wealthy rancher's wife and mother to four children. [38] By the time she posts the final "Poetry of a Madwoman" volume, her commenters (mostly friends and family at that point) have taken to calling Drummond "Sylvia Plath." However, this portrait, while not scrubbed from the site altogether, is safely ensconced in the archives while the sunnier, more superficial version of "Ree Drummond, the Pioneer Woman" occupies the front pages, a version of the Pioneer Woman that took over the site as it gained popularity and generated book deals. The mediated image of the Pioneer Woman, rather than gesturing toward any deeper state of being than appreciation for her children and her husband's virility, chats superficially at her readership in pithy one- to two-sentence paragraphs,

[38] The Drummond ranch has been in operation since the late 19th/early 20th century when Frederick Drummond emigrated from Scotland and established himself on the lands belonging to the Osage Nation in 1886. Ree Drummond's husband, Ladd, is a fourth generation Drummond rancher. Drummond Land & Cattle Company receives millions of dollars from the federal government in hay and wheat subsidies, the Bureau of Land Management's wild mustang program, and subsidies related to its beef cattle operation. A 2000 SEC filing estimates Ladd Drummond's personal worth at more than $2 million.

which are broken up by photographs of her subjects and peppered with joking references to her own silliness or cellulite.

This cheery, self-deprecating version of the Pioneer Woman, I should note, is wildly popular. She is wildly popular not because the recipes are particularly remarkable — her repertoire includes chocolate mousse made from Hershey bars, cornbread, cinnamon rolls, chicken spaghetti, all very Midwestern, middle-class fare — or that homeschooling is particularly remarkable, but because she has crafted an online persona that women have responded to almost universally. As I mentioned previously, the site garners more than 10 million hits per month.[39] *The Pioneer Woman Cooks* became a *New York Times* bestseller and was one of Amazon.com's Top 10 books of 2010. When Drummond (along with her husband and children) appeared at BookPeople in Austin to promote her cookbook in December 2009, the second floor of the bookstore was packed and people waited in line for more than an hour to get their cookbooks signed. *Black Heels to Tractor Wheels* was a bestseller on Amazon.com before its February 1, 2011 release. In short, in five years' time, *The Pioneer Woman* has become a cultural juggernaut among middle-class American women in an increasingly urbanized country.

Blogger Penelope Trunk, reflecting on the disparities in traffic between *Dooce* (dooce.com)[40] and *The Pioneer Woman*, argues that while *Dooce* represents a gritty, "realistic" portrayal of life peppered with vulgar language and Mormon-bashing, Pioneer

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[39] Viele, Anna. "How Much Do Bloggers Make? Case Study: Ree Drummond AKA The Pioneer Woman." *ABDPBT*. Web. 7 Mar 2011. <http://www.abdpbt.com/personalfinance/how-much-do-bloggers-make-case-study-ree-drummond-aka-the-pioneer-woman/>.

[40] A "mommy blog," authored by Heather Armstrong, that has experienced a similar rise in popularity, garnering multiple book deals and enabling Armstrong to support her family financially via ad revenue from the site.

Woman engages in "housewife porn" and has created an online space in which no one ever fights with their spouse about money or is overwhelmed by the laundry (although Drummond does make joking allusions to a never-ending pile of laundry). Women, says Trunk, "don't want to see themselves reflected back to them."[41] However, this only explains part of Pioneer Woman's appeal to women of her approximate demographic. When it comes to the Pioneer Woman, women *like* to see themselves reflected back to them, because she has cultivated such an affable, folksy image. On the Pioneer Woman's Facebook fan page, Drummond posts the occasional frivolous status update, like this one from November 10, 2010: "I think I'll actually do my hair today instead of tying it in a knot and fastening it with a pencil." This one-line status update garnered hundreds of responses (and "Likes"), including "omg, I do the pencil thing too," "Mine has a pencil in it right now," "I resemble that remark," "That's my favorite way to do my hair, though," and "i thought the pencilled knot WAS doing our hair!" Many respondents adopted a tone of familiarity, as though they were addressing a close girlfriend: "oooooo, Miss Fancy!" "Now don't go crazy. Next you'll be spraying Sun-In and teasing." "you go girl!" "Now, now, no need to get all fancy on us!" Despite the fact that this was not a dialogue or even a meaningful interaction with Drummond, but rather a sustained chain of reactions to a single sentence, women responded with staggering enthusiasm in response to seeing some aspect of their experience, however trivial, reflected back to them via the constructed Pioneer Woman image.

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[41] Trunk, Penelope. "Check-up for self-delusion." *Penelope Trunk's Brazen Careerist*. 7 February 2010. Web. 23 Feb 2011. <http://blog.penelopetrunk.com/2010/02/07/check-up-for-self-delusion/>.

And yet, this image is tinged with cynicism. Kenneth Burke writes in *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1950):

> The extreme heterogeneity of modern life […] combined with the nature of modern postal agencies, brings up another kind of possibility: the systematic attempt to *carve out* an audience, as the commercial rhetorician looks not merely for persuasive devices in general, but for the topics that will appeal to the particular "income group" most likely to be interested in his product, or able to buy it. (64)

This aspect of identification is crucial to persuasion and, within the market, cookbook (or romance novel or children's book) sales, not to mention ad revenue generated simply by surfing to thepioneerwoman.com. So, if Pioneer Woman holds her hair in place with a pencil and I, too, hold my hair in place with a pencil, I identify with Pioneer Woman and feel greater kinship with her.[42] The more kinship I feel with Pioneer Woman, the more I trust her and am more likely to purchase *The Pioneer Woman Cooks* ($27.50), *Black Heels to Tractor Wheels* ($25.99), and *Charlie the Ranch Dog* (a children's book based on Drummond's beloved Bassett hound, Charlie, who is featured extensively on the website; $16.99). The success of the Pioneer Woman model depends not on women identifying with the exhausted woman in a puddle on the filthy tile floor, but on identifying with the woman who jokes about her plump arms or idly contemplates dyeing a blue streak into her hair.

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[42] The converse example, rooted in *Schadenfreude*, would be the gossip magazines' propensity to publish photographs of celebrities sans makeup or with painfully obvious cellulite emblazoned with the banner, "Stars! They're Just Like Us!"

I see two major reasons behind Pioneer Woman's appeal to readers. The first is that she (the mediated image) represents an idealized woman, a frontier version of the angel in the house with a 21st-century twist, one who offers up domesticity as escapist entertainment. She offers a nostalgic image of a pastoral Midwestern existence that, while a simulacrum, has found traction in an increasingly urbanized nation.[43] Second, in the process of "keepin' it real," Drummond-as-Pioneer-Woman regurgitates hegemonic tropes of femininity and masculinity in that she frequently posts worshipful entries extolling her husband's virtues, which include his chaps-clad rear end and muscular forearms; additionally, her pet name for him, Marlboro Man, conjures up images of rugged Western masculinity and virility, and, ironically, toxicity in that the nickname gestures toward an iconic advertising campaign for the Marlboro cigarette brand. In addition to gesturing to a widely recognized brand, the Marlboro Man moniker also suggests nostalgia for a time when smoking was socially sanctioned and widely practiced, a time when women were still largely at home. At the same time, the matrix of feminized domesticity she constructs through her posts about cooking, her children, homeschooling, and home-related product recommendations such as quilts and jewelry-storage systems reinforces the image of Drummond as the angel in the (ranch) house, attending to all things domestic while her rugged, virile, Dr. Pepper-swilling husband attends to manly things outdoors, like working cows and castrating calves. As the

[43] According to the 2010 U.S. Census, 82% of American citizens lived in cities and suburbs, up 3% from 2000.

evolution of the blog suggests in its movement from the emotionally visceral to the imaginary, it is in the imaginary that the Pioneer Woman finds her audience.

And yet, when the gaps in the imaginary community of sameness are revealed, usually when Drummond moves from encouraging voyeurism to suggesting items for purchase, the backlash is swift. For example, Drummond, an avid collector of china, frequently includes "China Checks" in her recipe entries, anticipating curious readers' queries as to what pattern her food rests on in the photographs. In this photograph of pumpkin cream pie, Drummond informs readers via the "China Check" that the pattern is from the Herend Rothschild "Bird" service she received from her godmother (see Fig. 1).

Figure 1

Similarly, the china check in Figure 2 informs us that the cherry cake in the photograph rests on a piece from the Lenox “Chirp” pattern.

Figure 2

Finally, the sour cream enchiladas in Figure 3 await consumption on a plate from the Tracy Porter “Vivre” pattern.

Figure 3

The common ground among all of these china patterns is that they are high-end, expensive tableware. The Herend Rothschild costs $545 per five-piece place setting, the Lenox is slightly more affordable at $143 per four-piece place setting, and the Porter pattern is approximately $300 for service for four. Interestingly, readers do not push back against the display of these pricey pieces, most likely because Drummond mentions that certain objects have been given to her as gifts from friends and family. To that end, any

woman who has received an expensive china service as a wedding gift can still identify with Drummond, even though the china on display may be out of her own personal financial reach. To wit, one reader responded on another entry featuring the Lenox pattern, "Ree! You have chirp! I should have known a fellow china obsessed person would seek out such a fantastic set of china and grab hold…I picked out Chirp for my wedding china last year, and although I'm still collecting it is by far one of my favorite wedding items to use and just stare at. Plus it mixes perfect with my fiestaware" ("Blueberry Crumb Cake," July 27, 2010). This reader's response exhibits an identification with Drummond as a fellow china enthusiast, as well as her position as a newly married woman who pairs expensive china she has been gifted with the more pedestrian and affordable Fiesta china;[44] this suggests an aspirational young homemaker who perhaps considers Drummond a virtual homemaking mentor. Responses such as these suggest that as long as an item is theoretically available to the reader, via wedding registries or other gift-receiving opportunities, or that another item (say, a pumpkin pie made with vanilla pudding mix) is the subject of the post, the reader will not respond negatively. However, if Drummond recommends a product that is accessible to her readers in a way that is removed from rote acquisition or is *not* accessible to them via their economic circumstances, they assert their authority over her, thereby rupturing the illusion of sameness and trust.

[44] Brightly colored ceramic dinnerware known for its sturdiness and affordability. Consumers can purchase Fiesta by the piece, rather than in more expensive bundles; this allows them to mix and match the colors and replace broken items with ease.

On January 17, 2011, Drummond posted about "A Few Beautiful Quilts," then proceeded to praise quilts from various catalogs, including one from Pottery Barn costing $599. Readers were quick to question the authenticity of mass-produced, "imported" quilts, asserting that "real" quilts are assembled by hand in America ("A true quilt is handmade and passed from generation to generation," "Please, STOP buying imports and BUY AMERICAN made quilts," "Those aren't quilts, they're blankets," "When I think 'quilt,' I think of hope chests, and quilting bees […] and made with love by a single woman, a family, or a community."). One woman commented that she was a novice quilter who had made two baby quilts for her children on her "$70 WalMart sewing machine." One reader in particular, Debi, remarked that she had presented Drummond with a handmade quilt bearing a cowgirl motif at a book signing in Pennsylvania and Drummond had failed to look at it or acknowledge it later. "So many quilters read you Ree; it's going to be interesting to see how they comment today," she wrote. "I love your web site, read you every day but my feelings were hurt. And are again today." In showcasing mass-produced, cheaply made quilts, Drummond offended her readers' sense of justice; alienated home quilters, including those who rely on down-market sewing machines purchased at Wal-Mart; and challenged their understanding of gendered communities, such as the ones that assemble quilts for brides' hope chests; quilts are made by communities of women, not by underpaid workers in Chinese factories. The overwhelmingly negative feedback Drummond received reveals the tension between the carefully crafted image of the Pioneer Woman and what might appeal to her readers and her understanding of who, exactly, her readers are; yet such a rupture does not seem to

create a lasting distance between Drummond and her readers. Unlike the fans of Betty Crocker who burst into tears upon learning that she was not a real person,[45] because there is a real person behind the Pioneer Woman, her fans must simply write off these breaches as a human mistake.

A similar backlash transpired when Drummond posted a product recommendation for hand-painted ceramic coffee mugs for sale on Etsy.com.[46] She wrote, "I think they'd make a great birthday gift, office gift … or just a nice gift to yourself" ("Ceramic Eco-Friendly Travel Mugs," January 19, 2011). Of the 300 comments in reply to this posting, the overwhelming majority of them were in response to the prices of the mugs, which ranged from $40-$50, plus $15 for shipping. Some took issue with the designation of "eco-friendly": "I think people forget part of being Green is reducing consumption–not buying more! Reduce, Reuse, Recycle is still a mantra for some. Buying a bunch of NEW stuff to replace items that you may already have, is not Green behavior! It's materialistic and consumeristic [sic]." Others were offended by the impracticality of such a purchase: "$70 for a mug?!? I have had dresses that didn't cost that much. Yikes." Some even took jabs at the Drummonds' income sources, suggesting the Pioneer Woman's privilege blinds her to what her readers can realistically afford: "I think I'm going to have to wrangle some wild mustangs to take care of in my backyard and get some lucrative govenment [sic] subsidies to be able to afford them." These often-harsh responses to Drummond's product recommendations serve as notable ruptures in the rhetoric of

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[45] See Marks, Susan. *Finding Betty Crocker: The Secret Life of America's First Lady of Food*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2005. Print.

[46] A place for crafters to sell their wares online.

sameness she cultivates; indeed, while Drummond rarely responds to comments on her site, the entry in question includes an update in which she notes that she had not noticed the prices of the cups when she wrote the entry, concluding with, "While they may seem a bit high and might not appeal to everyone, however, I do like to highlight different (even special) things every now and then," ("Eco-Friendly Travel Mugs"). But Drummond's justification of showcasing the "special" product is not meant to appease the disgruntled reader (although keeping them happy is paramount to sustaining revenue); rather, it serves as part of a broader consumption-driven, one-click ethos that defines the site, one that is rooted in a cheerful endorsement of packaged foods.

In addition to containing ingredient lists that prominently feature packaged food, the recipes featured on the site and in the cookbook are not new or particularly innovative. The overarching theme of the recipes is comfort food along the lines of steak and macaroni and cheese, recipes for which can be found in the nearest copy of *Joy of Cooking* (first published in 1931), the *Betty Crocker Picture Cookbook* (first published in 1950), or one of any church fundraising cookbooks. Drummond occasionally makes a few tweaks to the ingredient list — for example, substituting white wine for vodka and adding shrimp to convert penne a la vodka to "penne a la Betsy" (Drummond's sister) — but on the whole, these recipes have long been in circulation in American kitchens, including the kitchens of Drummond's childhood community of Bartlesville, Oklahoma. In fact, Drummond frequently references her mother's church cookbook, *Heavenly Fodder* (Saint Luke's Episcopal Church, Bartlesville, OK, 1986), as the provenance for many of the recipes on her site, although she very rarely mentions the title of the

community cookbook. Anne Bower concludes her introduction to *Recipes for Reading* with a wish for the reader, that she "read[s] the [community cookbook] for information about the lives and values of the people who put it together, reading the story they've bound together with the recipes" (14). But what does it mean when that compilation of lives and values is appropriated and compromised? When those women's stories are elided in service to an entirely different story altogether, one that has tenuous ties to reality?

The anonymous blogger at *The Marlboro Woman* (themarlborowoman.com), an anti-Pioneer Woman site, announced on April 26, 2011 that she had procured a copy of *Heavenly Fodder*. In this entry, Marlboro Woman pointed out that the French Breakfast Puffs from *The Pioneer Woman Cooks* (66) is directly lifted from a recipe Drummond's mother, Gerre Smith, contributed to *Heavenly Fodder*, with the proportions doubled. However, rather than attribute said recipe to her mother, Drummond writes in her cookbook that she learned the recipe in a ninth-grade French class. (The corresponding blog entry from December 14, 2007, attributes the recipe to her French teacher, Madame Smith.) That Drummond has commodified the contents of a community cookbook, compiled by the women comprising the cookbook committee at Saint Luke's, has troubling implications for both the community that generated the fundraising cookbook and for Drummond's community of readers.

In "Growing Up with the Methodist Cookbooks," Ann Romines reads her family's collection of Methodist cookbooks from her childhood in Houston, Missouri, as complex historical texts that not only evoke the sights, smells, and flavors of her youth,

but also documents the women who populated her hometown, linked together in these cookbooks in "a community of mutual acknowledgment and obligation […] And that community was reconstituted daily, at the kitchen table" (76-7). She describes the authoritative voice of the women cooks and their unspoken knowledge of what it means to "can cold," and argues that, armed with the appropriate contextual information, a reader can piece together a woman's life, to some degree, based on the recipes she contributed to the cookbooks. For example, when Romines' mother submitted recipes for "fancy" party foods like ginger ale punch and apricot candy in the 1941 cookbook, this was a reflection of her current lifestyle as a single, childless professional; similarly, Romines is able to construct a more complete portrait of her paternal grandmother by perusing her old copies of the Methodist cookbook and making note of Grandmother Bess's personal notations (77-8). She writes, "my grandmother's penciled notation redeems her from the somewhat stern and decided figure I think I remember, telling me that this woman was fond and observant enough to inscribe the silliest fragment of her youngest son's baby talk" (79). In presenting a reading of the Houston Methodist Church cookbooks, placing them within the cultural and historical context of her home community in the Ozarks, Romines makes an argument for the community cookbook as a vital aspect of the anthropology of women's lives. This is the sort of project that is lost when Ree Drummond appropriates the recipes from *Heavenly Fodder*, stripping them of the names of the women who submitted them and of the stories that place them in their context and replacing them with manufactured ones. In doing claiming other women's

creative expressions as her own, Drummond betrays not only the Saint Luke's cookbook committee, but also her community of female readers in service to her individual profit.

The artifice of the persona and the web of worshipful readers who believe in her is emblematized in the January 4, 2011, recipe for Pistachio Cake. It starts with a joking disclaimer that it is a very complicated recipe, but then reveals that the ingredient list actually includes a box of instant pistachio pudding, a box of Pillsbury "Classic White" cake mix, and Hershey chocolate-flavored syrup. She then proceeds to offer a step-by-step photographic lesson on how to mix up the cake and pour it into a bundt pan. Here we see a repetition of her standardized pattern, the visual step-by-step tutorial, but for a mass-produced convenience food that calls for two ingredients and three steps. The instructions include the step, "Bake until the cake is no longer jiggly like my arms," which is an example of Drummond's typical self-deprecating style. This decades-old potluck favorite is also known as Watergate Cake due to its popularity in the 1970s during the Watergate scandal. Many recipes from that era also include instructions for "Cover-Up Frosting"; instead of frosting, Drummond adapts the recipe to include chocolate.

This recipe underscores the absolute flattening of home cooking, divesting it of any required skill, intuition, creativity, or even ingredients, while also hitting all the right notes of identification, tonally, for readers, even though one could perceive this post as mocking or condescending. This moment is reminiscent of the phenomenon described in Shapiro in which packaged convenience foods entered the marketplace in the 1950s and were roundly rejected by housewives, who took no small amount of pride in their scratch

cooking. The food industry searched for ways to convince these supposedly harried housewives that they needed these shortcuts, employing psychologists to ascertain the best ways to influence their income group; they discovered that if women felt as though they still did some of the work, like breaking an egg or pouring sherry over frozen peas, their integrity as home cooks would remain intact. The eventual success of commercially prepared convenience foods, then, is the product of industrial rhetoric deployed in the interest of generating profits. This seems to be the case here, too. Of the more than 200 comments on this post, only one protested the pair of "doctored cake mix" entries featured on the site that week. It seems as though despite the rise of locavorism and the emphasis on home cooking in the popular discourse, if the Pioneer Woman, a significant "influencer" in the blogosphere, sanctions the use of cake mixes and boxed pudding, even those who regularly eschew boxed mixes will make an exception to try one of her recipes.[47] This may be especially true because Drummond suggests (and sometimes even promises) that the recipes on her site will earn the home cook accolades, friends, and perhaps even marriage proposals;[48] such a promise, of course, echoes Betty Crocker's guarantee of "a perfect cake, every time you bake – cake after cake after cake" (Shapiro 195) as well as the advertising and cookbook rhetoric that promised midcentury

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[47] See, for example, "Chocolate Pistachio Cake." *My Life on a Plate*. Blogspot.com, 17 January 2011. Web. 24 Feb 2011. <http://delkeelife.blogspot.com/2011/01/chocolate-pistachio-cake.html>.

[48] See Drummond, Ree. "Beef Fajita Nachos." *The Pioneer Woman*. 1 February 2011. Web. 7 Mar 2011. <http://thepioneerwoman.com/cooking/2011/02/beef-fajita-nachos/ > and Drummond, Ree. "The Pioneer Woman Cooks: Recipes From An Accidental Country Girl by Ree Drummond." *HarperCollins.com*. HarperCollins Publishers, n.d. Web. 7 Mar 2011. <http://www.harpercollins.com/books/Pioneer-Woman-Cooks-Ree-Drummond/?isbn=9780061658198>.

housewives the approbation of their husbands and children for their performance in the kitchen.

Just as consumers could not interact with Betty Crocker, the readership communities attached to Pioneer Woman cannot interact meaningfully with Drummond; indeed, the relationship between Drummond and her readers is unidirectional. Despite their identification with her, readers are unable to "only connect" with Ree Drummond the person. For example, Drummond frequently features giveaways and contests on *Pioneer Woman*; the prizes include KitchenAid mixers, expensive digital cameras, iPads, and $250 gift cards to Anthropologie and Amazon.com. The giveaways are usually predicated upon readers answering a question related to how the reader might use the product in the comments section and their answer counts as their entry; these posts usually generate tens of thousands of comments. Critics suspect that the questions are used to gather demographic information about Pioneer Woman's readership in order to craft future content accordingly; other critics of the giveaways suggest that Drummond uses them (which she finances from ad revenue generated by her site) to generate more traffic (and therefore more ad revenue). At Drummond's book signings, she says a few words, answers a few questions, does an Ethel Merman impersonation, and then signs books and poses for pictures with her fans. The transactional nature of Drummond's interactions with her readership and fans underscores the fact that the marketplace is the defining logic of the Pioneer Woman universe.

Indeed, the highly gendered emphasis on consumption — of convenience/comfort/potluck food, mass-produced quilts, and various items from the

Anthropologie catalogue — within this commodified "domestic" lifestyle portal serves to underpin the stereotypes of women's lived experiences (much like those perpetuated by General Mills in its manipulation of the American housewife via Betty Crocker) that feminists have fought for generations to dispel. When readers buy into a unidirectional relationship with a mediated image like the Pioneer Woman who does not really care so much about them as she does about building her own personal brand, as the numerous ruptures in the Pioneer Woman persona suggests, their power is relegated strictly to the realm of consumers rather than as citizens and subjects. There is no connection except within the realm of the imaginary. Shauna Ahern's blog, on the other hand, presents a more complex relationship with her readers, one that precariously negotiates a tension between a studied, soul-baring honesty and an increasingly monetized and professionalized blog.

"It's possible that I have never really met myself": Living and Blogging Gluten-Free

When Shauna James Ahern was diagnosed with celiac disease in the spring of 2005, she began documenting her new life, one free of illness and lethargy, on glutenfreegirl.com. Over the past six years, Ahern has documented her emergence into the kitchen, her discovery of a deep joy found in food, the inception of the relationship with her like-minded now-husband, and has professionalized her journey as a pioneer in gluten-free living with the publication of a memoir, *Gluten-Free Girl: How I Found the Food That Loves Me Back … And You Can Too* (2009) and *Gluten-Free Girl and the Chef* (2010), a cookbook. As a woman-authored food blog, Gluten-Free Girl does three things: it charts

a discovery of self, a subjectivity shaped in response to outside forces (celiac disease); encourages readers to make peace with their bodies; and interrogates Western culture's attitudes toward food, destabilizing readers' relationships with packaged foods by demonstrating that it is possible to live and eat well without relying on mass-produced food. However, despite Ahern's emphasis on living in one's body, practicing mindfulness in relationship to food, and privileging locally sourced organic foods, her professional connections to corporate sponsors trouble the direct engagement she has with her readership, who respond enthusiastically to her deeply personal blogging ethos.

That Ahern destabilizes accepted categories of food and the body through her gluten-free journey is an outcropping of how her own sense of self was destabilized with the celiac diagnosis; she writes in her memoir, "I had a visceral understanding that I was now a self I had never been before." Jokingly called "the Sick Girl" by her friends for years, Ahern suffered from chronic exhaustion, nausea, headaches, and various other ailments in the months leading up to her diagnosis. In the inaugural post on the blog, "Diagnosed with celiac" (May 10, 2005), Ahern explains celiac disease as "a genetic intolerance for gluten, and it has apparently been damaging my small intestine for years. Silently. Or at least in language I didn't know how to recognize." Indeed, as Ahern reveals, celiac demands a new attention to language and the ways that the food industry can disguise an ingredient, stating that "gluten hides insidiously in almost every processed food, disguised as modified food starch, distilled vinegar (they pour the vinegar through wheat), hydrolized vegetable oil, caramel color, dextrin, and even natural flavors. I have to read every box, decipher every food, ponder every bite I eat."

Additionally, Ahern articulates her old life with a roll call of what will be absent in her new life: "[…] a pain au chocolate in Paris. Sunday cinnamon rolls in Sitka. […] A chocolate cake for my birthday. A Top Pot doughnut. Or a bowl of oatmeal. Ever again" ("Diagnosed with celiac"). In this list, we can see the profound ways in which food defines one's experience of life, from trips abroad to leisurely Sunday mornings accented with sticky-sweet pastries, and how celiac will forever color these experiences for Ahern. And yet, rather than mourn the *pain au chocolate* and doughnuts, Ahern embraces the challenges and deprivations ahead of her, declaring, "if it means I'll never have this pain or lethargy or brain fog again? No problem" ("Diagnosed with celiac").

In same blog entry, Ahern writes that the celiac diagnosis and her subsequent gluten-free diet may have actually allowed her to discover who she truly is: "If I feel this good after ten days, what am I going to feel like in a year? It's possible that I have never really met myself." While that sentiment may sound trite on its surface, Ahern explains that her entire life was marked by illness and discomfort, from the searing stomachaches of her high school years, which the family doctor suggested could be ovarian cancer, to the intense pain and chronic sickness she experienced in the two years preceding her diagnosis. She argues that the sickness she suffered served as a barrier to being fully present in her body and mind. This new unified self allows Ahern to move from discovering herself to rediscovering food and cooking, which then enables her to interrogate and sometimes write against the various dimensions of food politics, such as Americans' overreliance on processed foods, food as a social justice issue, and the choice to eat meat (or not), as well as interrogating women's relationships with their bodies. In

the process of depicting a gluten-free life, Ahern is able to draw in other, stickier topics without being overtly political, if not subtly feminist; put another way, rather than deploying an overtly political stance or railing angrily against the food industry and the injustice of celiac, it is Ahern's introspection and careful appreciation of food that sets the tone.

As the blog progresses, it moves from being a journal of exploring the dimensions of gluten-free living to a bona-fide cooking blog with original recipes and lovingly photographed food. In the early days of the blog, Ahern declares, "If I hadn't been handed this celiac diagnosis, I never would have found myself so firmly planted in my kitchen" ("Loving the kitchen," August 3, 2005). In between describing her trips to local co-ops, grocery stores, and a suburban gluten-free bakery located in a strip mall, Ahern describes her new relationship to food and the joy she derives from being able to eat without pain:

> Life is not boring without gluten. In fact, it has bloomed even more fully for me now. I pay attention to food, mindfully, delightedly, in a way I never did before. I took it for granted before I was diagnosed with celiac disease. Now, I find the choicest ingredients, smelling olive oil for hints of warmth, insisting on fresh vegetables, searching for the best local sausage makers and chocolates. Now, I actively look forward to every meal, knowing that it will make me that much healthier. Good life is abundant, all around me. ("Cooking your own dinner makes it taste better," August 9, 2005)

Because Ahern's afflictions were so closely related to her consumption of food, it is unsurprising that she conflates good food with good life, that the satisfaction of hand-selecting ingredients trumps hastily throwing boxes of food into a grocery cart and provides a more pleasurable experience – not just of eating, but of living. Ahern is driven by her disease to be circumspect about and deliberate in her food choices; not only does she serve as a resource for fellow celiacs (and the gluten-sensitive), but she also reveals an aesthete's proclivities where food is concerned.

This epicurean turn reveals a blind spot on Ahern's part to the class implications of being able to leisurely scour the farmers' markets and procure the best, highest-quality ingredients she can find. At the time of the blog's inception, Ahern was an unmarried high-school teacher living in an apartment in Seattle, which would explain her access to leisure time and disposable income; today, Ahern is a full-time blogger whose income derives from ad revenue, cookbook sales, speaking engagements, and so on, which suggests that, even though she is married and mother to a small daughter, she still has access to the expanses of time that allow for prolonged grocery shopping trips and, apparently, a budget that accommodates a carefully curated daily menu. From this evidence, we can infer that Ahern has not had to consider what an excursion to the grocery store, co-op, or farmers' market might look like for a family that has neither the time nor the budget to peruse the shelves and stalls for the best possible ingredients.

However, Ahern's leisurely excursions to the farmers' markets are crucial to her growing identity as a person with celiac and as a nascent cook. In August 2005, Ahern shares recipes found from other sources, such as *Cooking Light* magazine and the Dining

section of the *New York Times*, while also recounting shopping trips to her favorite local farmers' markets and the surprising discoveries she makes there. Through these narratives, Ahern models an accessible-to-some lifestyle and an openness to change and seasonal eating. She writes, "I love how meandering in the market can change the way I eat," and recounts her discovery of amaranth, a gluten-free grain with edible greens ("Grilled cheese with amaranth leaves," August 29, 2005). She then goes on to explain that amaranth has just come into season, and describes its historical and cultural uses for the reader, sharing a recipe for a grilled-cheese sandwich featuring the amaranth leaves at the end. By the end of 2005, Ahern is sharing gluten-free recipes she has developed, such as chocolate-chip cookies comprising a staggering combination of four separate gluten-free flours. In 2006, Ahern meets Daniel Ahern, a chef, and they embark upon a romantic partnership that also extends into the kitchen. Together they begin to develop recipes like pork chops with plum sauce; various pizzas; risotto with English peas, fava beans, and prosciutto; and crab cakes with shrimp mousse and avocado. As Ahern writes in the introduction to *Gluten-Free Girl and the Chef*, "After I was diagnosed with celiac, I said yes to food, with great enthusiasm" (11). One part of saying yes to food, for Ahern, was discovering how to cook from scratch and to embrace improvisation; the other part, necessarily, was learning how to eat without relying on processed foods, which often have gluten lurking in surprising places, such as in potato chips.

The ways in which Ahern interrogates our cultural attitudes toward food stem in part from demonstrating the ways in which gluten-free living enables one to opt-out of the corporate stranglehold on our food supply. She writes, "If you're just diagnosed with

celiac, and wondering what your life is going to be like from now on, here's a clue: learn to cook whole, real food, with natural ingredients in season, and filled with flavor for it, and you're going to be perpetually pounding your fist on the table in pure pleasure" ("Would You Like this dipped in a fish slurry?", August 11, 2005). But this pleasure need not apply to those suffering from celiac. Indeed, the average American's diet can "bloom with pleasure," if only she would embrace the delights that await her in the kitchen, from the soulful satisfaction of commensality to the joy bestowed by incorporating the flavorful plumpness of seasonal produce: "It saddens me to hear people say, 'Oh, I never have time to cook.' America binges on fast food grease and frozen forlornness" ("Loving the kitchen," August 3, 2005). Indeed, the nearly five years of the site's existence is a document of one woman's love affair with food and cooking in its most basic form, with the extended pleasures of saying "yes" to food — "real" food, rather than packaged, processed cognates. Yet while this editorial comment on America's food culture gestures toward Ahern's distaste for Big Food (and those who consume it) and its incompatibility with celiac sufferers, we will also see this attitude compromised in that as *Gluten-Free Girl and the Chef* grows in popularity and professionalism, industrial food products make their way into the site's discourse. In short, the margins of the types of food Ahern will say "yes" to in 2011 expand to include the very structures she pushed back against in 2005.

For Ahern, saying yes to food and being mindful about one's food choices also brings other considerations to bear; once she overcomes the burden of incorporating a gluten-free diet into her lifestyle — indeed, allowing it shape her entire life — she is able

to address larger, systemic issues from her particular worldview. For example, in a post dedicated to promoting her friend Tara Austen Weaver's memoir/cookbook, *The Butcher and the Vegetarian* (2010), Ahern asserts that the book is Weaver's "journey to find her own personal answer to how she wants to be in the world" ("Millet salad with green juice," May 6, 2010), then chronicles her own family's personal decision regarding meat consumption, which is that they prefer meat from local farms and ranches, which can be expensive, so they often forego meat. Ahern argues that meat is a class issue, because not everyone can afford to purchase locally farmed meat, and that we as a culture need to have a conversation about whether we should eat meat, making sure to articulate why or why not. She writes, "We very much hope that you read *The Butcher and the Vegetarian* […] because you will be thinking about your food choices afterward in a different fashion. I really do not believe there is one right way. What we need is the conversation, conducted with kindness. This book will start you talking" ("Millet salad with green juice," May 6, 2010). She then offers up three copies of the book to give away in exchange for a "measured, thoughtful" comment on how readers see themselves as part of the conversation about meat.

This post garnered much commentary on the ethics and economics of eating meat. One reader wrote, "I have seen chickens on sale for £2 in supermarkets. Someone is being treated unfairly there and it's not just the chicken." Other readers said that they preferred the taste of ethical meat, or that they struggled with not being able to afford locally sourced, grass-fed meats. What is remarkable about this post and the ensuing discussion (122 commenters contributed to the conversation) is that Ahern successfully

extended the very touchy subject of eating meat to her commenters, asking them to be respectful and circumspect. She holds her readers to the same standards she sets forth for herself, and the result is a civil conversation about the various dimensions of a touchy subject, all while keeping the discussion rooted within the context of personal experience, rather than performing or repeating a self-righteous or political stance either for or against eating meat. Unlike the Pioneer Woman, Ahern engages in a multidirectional discourse *with* her readers, rather than talking *at* them.

We can also see this discursive dynamic on display when Ahern considers the reasons for and consequences of saying "yes" to too much food, or to saying "no" to food. Despite whether the problem is the effect of too much food or the self-loathing that leads to saying no to food, Ahern strives to make peace with her body and encourages readers to make peace with theirs by resisting the hegemonic demands upon them to be thin and fit. Again, these discussions remain rooted firmly in Ahern's joyful, food-loving ethos, but they also necessitate a painful turn inward, as documented in "Carry that weight" (April 22, 2010). In it, Ahern writes,

> I have been afraid of writing this. You see, it has been tougher in our lives in the last year than I have let on here. This site is about baking and the goodness of life and funny stories and loving each other and cooking with a darling kid and falling down and helping others and the work of a chef and different flours and saying yes to it all. It has not felt like the right place to talk about terrifying life decisions, watching a baby in pain, living on the ragged edge of desolate sleep deprivation, worrying about cancer,

> taking a pill that saddens our lives into something we never expected, and coping with it all in old, familiar ways. This is a site about food and the joy of it. I have been eating too much food. And now I want to talk about it.

These opening lines are prefaced with a stark photograph of a meringue pie, and photographs of pies and pie crusts are interspersed throughout the extremely long entry. In it, Ahern describes the reasons why she has been eating too much food and, as a result, putting on weight. In vivid detail, Ahern recounts an ongoing crisis with her child's health, her mother's breast cancer, sleep deprivation, her daughter's surgery, and her own breast cancer scare, which was followed by ovarian and colon cancer scares. Ahern and her husband then made the painful decision to go on Tamoxifen as a prophylactic against Ahern developing breast or ovarian cancer, but which also meant the loss of future children. The result of all of these crises, Ahern writes, is too much stress eating: "Pie is comfort. Food became comfort again, instead of the singular joy of eating healthy and living in my body that it had been after my celiac diagnosis."

After laying bare her family's struggles, Ahern then declares her commitment to her own renewal, as well as to adjust and redefine her relationship with food:

> It's spring again, the time of re-birth. With halibut and sorrel, quinoa and chard, everything feels more healthy in the world. […] I'm still going to live in food. This is my passion, my joy, my shared work with Danny. I'm just trying to find a new relationship with food in this, a different way of being with it. […] I'm not going to say no to the self I am, or wish to

> remove parts of myself, or aim for some artificial goal. […] This isn't about a goal for me, the endpoint when I can finally relax and say *now I'm good enough*. I'm here. Now.

For Ahern, this renewal is not about achieving the perfect pants size or running a marathon, it is about accepting herself for who she is in the moment and adjusting the ways in which she relates to food in times of external pressure.

I would like to make note of the syntax of the first line of the entry, "I have been afraid of writing this." As written, it suggests that Ahern is afraid of the process of writing what she is about to write, including articulating or thinking about what is to be written. If she had written, "I have been afraid to write this," it would suggest a fear of the consequences of writing the entry, but not necessarily the complete process of writing it. That Ahern chose the syntax that she did indicates that even five years into her blog, she is still writing for herself, that the project of documenting her personal journey is still the primary object of the blog. But she also clearly acknowledges the intimate relationship between blog author and blog reader:

> Also, something has not been sitting well in my stomach these past few months, not writing about all this. I did what I could. It was all too raw at first. But this space is a haven, for me, for some of you. A place of laughter, yes. But also a place of sharing our stories and learning from each other. […] *Telling you is telling me*. […] The thirst for the genuine. That's why I am sharing this.

In this post, Ahern connects her food consumption with her health not in a way that pathologizes fatness, but as an extension of her love for her daughter and husband. In this passage, she quotes the poet and queer theorist Mark Doty on the coming-out process: "I felt then a great thirst for directness, an imperative to find language with which to be direct to myself, which is of course the result of having been, like many young gay men, divided from my self, from the authentic character of my desire. I felt I had to hide for years! And the result of that for me, once I began to break through the dissembling, was a thirst for the genuine." Ahern's appropriation here of a queer theorist's coming-out narrative is troubling in that it suggests that weight and body issues rise to the same threshold as sexual identity, thereby undermining decades of struggle for social equality via the gay rights movement. To put it bluntly, people are not targets of violent hate crimes because they eat too much, nor do they have wide swathes of civil liberties denied them because they are fat. While Ahern's "thirst for the genuine" enables her to absolve herself of her slide into comfort eating and excess weight, her chosen method for quenching that thirst cheapens the very well from which she drinks.

The post garnered more than 400 comments, many echoing gratitude for her honesty and realness: "I so appreciate the honesty. It takes your blog to a deeper level. Food needs to be real, authentic, and wholesome in the big sense. Congratulations on making this a REAL food blog." The readers' response suggests that the rubric for a "real" food blog is one in which the blogger's struggles in relation to food, in addition to the emphasis on fresh, seasonal, hand-selected ingredients, rather than repeating the same notes and structures again and again, are laid bare. Despite the extremely subjective

nature of Ahern's confession, readers approved of what they interpreted as her compassion, her honesty, and her empathy. When she writes, "telling you is telling me," Ahern also communicates that *she* identifies with her readers, rather than maneuvering to inspire identification from them. It is a reflexive, rather than unidirectional, relationship, one that is deeply rooted in mutual trust.

Ahern's two-way relationship with her readers extends from the virtual to the real in that Ahern chooses to work around the traditional book-signing model by hosting gluten-free picnics in cities where her book promotions take her. Recent picnics include one in San Francisco in Dolores Park following the BlogHer Food October 2010 conference and a gluten-free potluck at First Congregational Church in Boulder, Colorado, the following month. Readers can participate in "community cookalongs" on Facebook, wherein Ahern directs fans to a recipe in *Gluten-Free Girl and the Chef* to cook over a weekend and asks them to report back the following Monday. In this way she is able to pair cookbook sales with engendering community, further cultivating a sense of connection between and among her readers.

Ahern, through her reflective entries, builds upon that trust and compassion to create a space for her to reiterate her commitment to rejecting processed food and to critique the hegemonic rhetoric governing women's bodies. She describes an incident in early January in which she overhears two teenaged girls excoriating their bodies, cataloguing the things they hated about their physiques and vowing to give up all food until they were perfect. In her reflections on this moment, Ahern writes,

> I wanted to go talk to them and tell them to quit it. […] Mostly, I just wanted to give them both a hug. They had no idea how lovely they were. They're not alone. Raise your hand if you have thought of food as your enemy, something that must be controlled, slapped down, and taken away. Raise your hand if you thought your life would be *so much better* if you just weighed five pounds less. ("Apple-fennel slaw," January 12, 2011)

Ahern then advocates for a new attitude for January, in which one celebrates having lived another year, rather than feeling shame about excess holiday weight, writing, "diets are about deprivation, about negation, about denial and feeling like we're not truly alive until we're the *right* size. […] I've been thinking a lot about those teenage girls, the vituperation they threw at themselves. That didn't just happen. They have been listening to their friends, their sisters, and their mothers. But they also have been listening to this culture." Ahern argues for acceptance of the whole self and rather than treat holiday cookie consumption as a sickness and a sin that must be shed and absolved, that we be more gentle with ourselves and simply listen to what our bodies want, rather than to the external messages that our winter-plumped bodies are somehow "less than." Her slogan, "how about I listen to my body and you listen to yours," reinforces Ahern's body-as-subject ethos and encourages readers to adopt the same. This representation of her evolving sense of self, as well as her sustained, emphatic "yes," enables Ahern to question (and inspire readers to question) the static categories of food and one's individual relationship to it.

However, Ahern's relationship to packaged foods appears to have evolved along with her sense of self. As I mentioned previously, Ahern's "yes!" to food has expanded to include mass-produced, corporate foods as represented by the advertisements populating her website (see Fig. 4).

Figure 4

The images in the screenshot of the site, accessed February 26, 2011, perfectly capture the tension between Ahern's turn away from Big Food in favor of fresh and natural ingredients and the need or desire to professionalize her blog. Among the images on the right-hand side of the page are advertisements for various mass-produced gluten-free products, including Mary's Gone Crackers brand snacks, gluten-free frozen "fish portions," and Greek Gods yogurt. All of these products are nationally distributed, processed, packaged foods. Beneath these images is a graphic inviting potential advertisers to purchase space on the site; it prominently features a bucolic image of a rooster and a hen, which are appropriately representative of Ahern's emphasis on fresh, local, undoctrinated food. The jarring juxtaposition of these images suggests that Ahern has a more complicated relationship with packaged food than she lets on, or rather that she plays both ends against the middle in privileging fresh, local foods while generating revenue from corporate food.

Ahern's corporate revenue is not restricted solely to the ads on glutenfreegirl.com; she and her husband were compensated to blog at *Pork, Knife & Spoon* (http://porkknifeandspoon.com/), the official blog of the National Pork Board, from April 2009 to April 2011. There they shared pork-centric recipes and reflections on pork dishes they ate in restaurants or in others' homes. Ahern also wrote compensated posts on glutenfreegirl.com for the McCormick Gourmet program beginning in January 2011. In these posts, Ahern features a specific spice from the spice company's "gourmet" line — which includes a "Roasted" line of "exotic" spices such as Saigon cinnamon, ginger,

coriander, and cumin[49] — providing a history of its use and sharing a recipe featuring the spice. The McCormick-sponsored post on February 15, 2011, witnesses a convergence of Ahern's baldly confessional writing, her interaction with her audience, and the encroachment of the corporate sponsor, not to mention Ahern's marketing of her own product.

On February 8, Ahern invited readers to share their love stories in anticipation of the upcoming Valentine's Day holiday. She offered up items to give away in exchange for the stories, including cookware and copies of *Gluten-Free Girl and the Chef* ("beef tenderloin with balsamic onions and port sauce," February 8, 2011). The February 15 entry, "gluten-free Mexican hot chocolate cakes," was the follow-up to that post. In it she writes,

> I'll be honest. When we first thought of asking for your love stories, we thought of it as a way to promote our cookbook, *Gluten-Free Girl and the Chef*. After all, it's the perfect Valentine's Day gift, right? We gathered other cookbooks, baking supplies, and books with great love stories. All to remind you that you should buy our cookbook. You know what? We couldn't do it. After reading the first day's comments, Danny and I both agreed that choosing some at random and awarding prizes cheapened the whole thing. Your generosity was so astonishing that it would have felt tacky to give away stuff on top of this.

[49] As an attendee of BlogHer Food '10, I received a complimentary package of these spices as well.

I have left the underlining of the cookbook's title intact to indicate the embedded hyperlink on the blog to the Amazon.com page where the cookbook is available for purchase; in the process of disavowing the "cheap" urge to promote a product within the context of readers' personal love stories, Ahern seizes the opportunity to promote her product. After this solemn declaration, Ahern then goes on to aggregate links to other bloggers' testimonies of love, which is followed by a description of her family's Valentine's Day and an announcement that she and her husband have decided to adopt a son.

After this outpouring of love and emotion, Ahern finishes the post with a recipe for Mexican hot chocolate cakes, adapted from a McCormick's recipe, which she acquired while on a "spice weekend" in which the bloggers selected to write compensated posts were invited to the McCormick kitchens in Maryland to sample foods made with the company's spices; Ahern also went with the intention of investigating issues of cross-contamination so that she could ensure her readers that the products are gluten-free and thereby safe for consumption ("gluten-free sweet potato latkes," January 11, 2011). Before sharing the recipe for the gluten-free chocolate cakes, Ahern says that while she was unable to eat the cakes served at the spice weekend because they weren't gluten free, she "didn't suffer. They brought me Saigon cinnamon ice cream instead. I was happy." In one sentence Ahern manages to absolve McCormick of their dietary oversight while also plugging the brand's roasted Saigon cinnamon, which is a featured ingredient in the hot chocolate cakes. In this entry, Ahern enacts an uncomfortable juxtaposition of celebrating her readership and plugging her cookbook and McCormick

spices that is, ultimately, mercenary and exploitative. While Ahern may not be particularly cozy with Big Food, the ways in which she mines the trust she has built via the reflexive relationship with her readers is quite possibly more insidious than the Pioneer Woman's methods.

My analysis to this point has revealed the problems inherent to two ends of the spectrum when it comes to mediating Big Food: A persona like the Pioneer Woman, who cheerfully, uncritically embraces Big Food in the interest of furthering her own personal brand, makes no apologies for establishing a purely exchange-based relationship with her readership. Those who are uncomfortable with that relationship can choose to stop consuming the Pioneer Woman; the rest can and do accept that relationship, possibly in the hopes of winning an iPad or a custom KitchenAid mixer. On the other end of the spectrum is the Gluten-Free Girl, who via her visceral, deeply personal writing, cultivates both virtual and real relationships with her readers via her anti-Big Food stance, which is rooted in health concerns. Yet her increasingly monetized and branded blog compromises that relationship in that she — perhaps unwittingly — mines that trust to make money. The most comfortable middle ground, I will argue, can be found in the persona of Mrs. Q, who blogged anonymously about school lunch reform, simultaneously raising awareness of the problems of school lunch while encouraging her readership to think critically about the intrusive influence of Big Food in her readers' lives. By anonymously cultivating discourse about the problem of Big Food as it pertains to school lunch, Mrs. Q kept her stakeholders — the children who must consume the lunches — in clear view of her readership.

"The meals send the message to the kids that they are not cared about"[50]: Conviction, Anonymity, and School Lunch

Fed Up With Lunch (fedupwithlunch.com) provides another example of a blogger saying "yes" to food, but with markedly different stakes. In December 2010, Congress passed and President Obama signed into law the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010. The Act emphasizes greater nutritional standards in subsidized school lunches, as well as increases access to those lunches for underprivileged children. This development comes on the heels of high-profile, bitterly criticized attempts at school lunch reform such as Alice Waters' Edible Schoolyard program[51] and Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution,[52] which were condemned by some for being both elitist and expensive. Alternatively, in January 2010, an anonymous Midwestern schoolteacher calling herself Mrs. Q quietly took up the project of eating school lunch every day for one year and blogging it as a way to raise awareness of the state of the public-school lunchroom.

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[50] Shreeves, Robin. "An interview with school lunch blogger Mrs. Q." *MNN - Mother Nature Network*. Mother Nature Network, 21 January 2010. Web. 7 Mar 2011. <http://www.mnn.com/food/healthy-eating/blogs/an-interview-with-school-lunch-blogger-mrs-q>.

[51] A program of the Chez Panisse Foundation, the Edible Schoolyard was established in 1995 when Alice Waters installed a small cover crop garden at the Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School in Berkeley, California. It is now a full acre tended by students, yielding fruits, vegetables, herbs, and flowers. The program's mission is to incorporate organic gardening and nutrition into a school's culture and curriculum. The program has expanded to include urban schools in New Orleans, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York.

[52] Jamie Oliver is a British celebrity chef who led a grassroots campaign to transform school dinners in the UK before branching out overseas. His foray into American school kitchens took the form of a candid reality TV series called *Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution* in which Oliver met with school administrators, cafeteria workers, parents, children, and city officials in Huntington, West Virginia, chosen because it is statistically one of the unhealthiest cities in America. While the series was renewed for a second season, Oliver has met with resistance from officials in Los Angeles, who have barred him from access to any school cafeteria.

The first year of Mrs. Q's project, in which she surreptitiously photographed the lunches served at her school and posted them on her blog, interrogates the structures of school food and the education system through personal narrative, advocacy, and pedagogy, using various social media platforms as part of her methodology. While the blog is a platform for considered reflections on the complex relationships between food culture and socioeconomic class, and of food's role in a more holistic view of education, Mrs. Q uses Twitter to direct readers to relevant conversations taking place about general food-justice issues. She also curates a Flickr group where people can upload pictures of the school lunches they pack for their children. In deploying all of these platforms, Mrs. Q harnesses a complex discursive matrix that reveals the myriad stakeholders in the school-lunch system, questioning those who stand to profit the most at the expense of underprivileged children, those for whom the stakes of school lunch are the highest. Through her use of visual rhetoric, actively cultivating discourse with her readers (which number in the thousands daily), and by physically ingesting the contested object (school lunch), Mrs. Q removes the topic of school lunch reform from the realm of abstraction and into the practical realm of everyday life, embodying the immediacy of the issue and injecting a much-needed sense of urgency into the discourse of school lunch. While Mrs. Q revealed her true identity as Sarah Wu of Chicago, Illinois, on October 5, 2011, her anonymous archive forces readers to turn their attentions to their "real-life" communities and the change they can effect in their own school cafeterias, creating a clear-eyed view of the problem of school lunch unsullied by corporate sponsorship, an author's ego, or a mediated brand image.

The school lunch program is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, although it has its roots in more altruistic impulses. Its origins can be traced to the Great Depression, when people had very little access to food; after children started fainting in school due to extreme hunger, various civic groups and PTAs in cities like Chicago and New York began collecting funds in order to help supply these needy children with midday meals. The government got involved when it was faced with having to mitigate surplus crops, planted by farmers in the 1920s as a response to falling prices, and a devastated farm economy. School lunch as a "relief apparatus" (Poppendieck 47), then, helped both hungry children and impoverished farmers. In 1946, President Truman signed the National School Lunch Act into law, providing low-cost or free hot lunches to 31 million children. The program expanded to include the School Breakfast Program in 1966; it was authorized in 1975. Together, these two programs administer more than seven billion meals a year (Poppendieck 3). Participating schools receive a cash subsidy — about two dollars per meal — and donated commodities from the USDA for each meal served, and the meals must meet the nutrition standards set forth by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. However, Mrs. Q takes issue with the way those standards are interpreted by those who assemble each day's menu. For example, a school lunch must contain two grains, but those "grains" frequently take the form of white-flour dinner rolls, white pasta, white rice, and brand-name tortilla chips. Commodity meats include taco beef with added soy protein and chicken fajitas made from "marinated ready-to-cook boneless skinless strips of whole muscle dark chicken meat with grill markings";[53] these

[53] Food & Nutrition Service. *USDA Commodity Food Fact Sheet for Schools & Child Nutrition*

meats are unquestionably products of the industrial factory farm system, and any commodity grains are grown by federally subsidized industrial farms, upon which Monsanto has an effective monopoly. In short, Big Food is on the menu every day, twice a day, for impoverished children in America; the corporations profit while the children choke down (or throw away) bland, often inedible food nearly devoid of nutritional value. These are the factors that informed the inception of *Fed Up With Lunch*.

At the onset of the project, Mrs. Q explains why she chose to eat school lunch and document it every school day in 2010: "It's very challenging to teach students when they are eating school lunches that don't give them the nutrition they need and deserve. Oftentimes what is served barely passes muster as something edible. And after a meal high in sugar and fat and low in fiber, they then must pay attention in a classroom. […] The reason I'm eating school lunch every day is to raise awareness about school lunch food in America" ("My Idea," January 3, 2010). The initial posts are a bit threadbare in content, consisting mostly of a photograph of the day's lunch, a brief description of the food and its taste, and Mrs. Q's overall experience of the meal. For example, on "Day 1: Spaghetti with meat sauce" (Monday, January 4, 2010), she writes, "School lunch at my school/workplace always comes in these strange little packages. I have to say that it is very hard to open them. I have to stab them with the spork multiple times. The only reason I mention that is that if you have fine motor issues, it would take you awhile to get everything open. The kids get 20 minutes to eat including getting through line and clean

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Institutions. , 2007. Web. 1 Mar 2011. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/lunch/>.

up." Here she gestures subtly at the issues that, while minor annoyances to an adult, may mean the difference between eating lunch and going hungry for a child.

This empathy for the children who rely on school lunches as their primary source of nutrition also extends to the visual rhetoric of the project via the photos taken surreptitiously from her camera phone. As you can see in "Day 4: Chicken patty" (January 7, 2010; see Fig. 5), the tomato sauce on the chicken patty is very clearly burnt, which may cause many children to reject it, thereby missing out on a significant source of protein for their mid-day meal. The appearance of the lunch also suggests a lack of care on the part of those who prepare the meals, as though the recipients are not worthy of appropriate or even minimal quality control.

Figure 5

Later in the project, Mrs. Q posts a photograph of the peanut butter and jelly graham-cracker sandwiches that the students regularly receive as their primary entrée. She reports that the first time she ate them, the sandwiches made her sick. The next time they appeared on the menu, she took a close-up photograph of the nutrition information, revealing that they are extremely high in fat and calories (the lunch comes with two packaged sandwiches, despite the fact that a serving constitutes one sandwich; see Fig. 6).

Figure 6

While Mrs. Q does not claim to be an expert in nutrition, what she reveals in these photographs is a complete inattention to the finer points of children's nutritional needs — not to mention finding pleasure in food — on the part of those who determine school-lunch menus. It would appear that to the administrators of school lunch programs, children are merely anonymous empty bellies, mere repositories of surplus commodity foods.

Other ways in which Mrs. Q is attuned to the power of the visual is her semi-regular critiques of certain food advertisements. On August 18, 2010, she posts a close reading and analysis of an ad for Lunchables that depicts a child drawing exuberantly with sidewalk chalk. The caption reads, "Even da Vinci started somewhere." Mrs. Q

argues, “I have a feeling that da Vinci ate a Mediterranean diet that wasn’t wrapped in plastic … unbelievable!” She also notes that the actual product takes up very little visual room in the ad and wonders whether parents respond positively to this type of advertising. She follows up this analysis with a bit of investigative reporting, describing a trip to the grocery store in which she sought out the Lunchables in the prepackaged deli section, photographed the display, then shares a photograph of the ingredient list from a turkey and cheddar sandwich Lunchable, revealing an extremely long list of ingredients and a shocking sodium count of 590mg (25% of the RDA *for adults* based on a 2,000-calorie diet). However, rather than rail at length against Lunchables, Mrs. Q puts the incredibly loaded question to her readers: “Do you want your kids to eat these?” While the general tone of her post is heavily anti-Lunchables, she encourages parents (and would-be parents) to articulate their *own* positions as consumers on Big Food products such as these, rather than telling them what to think. While some commenters answered vehemently in the negative, a few dissenting voices defended Lunchables, saying “It’s not the end of the world to eat something terrible for you once or twice a month. […] They are incredibly convenient to keep in the back of the fridge to grab when you are incredibly strapped for time (yes there are times when 1 minute to pack a lunch is too much) or have run out of groceries.” On another post, “Homework: Your school district’s menus” (May 14, 2010), she asks her readers to post links to their home districts’ school lunch menus in the comments section, along with their personal commentary on those menus. More than 200 people responded, and the range of responses extend from chagrin at the highly processed, a la carte options to making connections between affluent

neighborhoods and fresh, healthy school-lunch fare. In putting questions such as these to her readers, Mrs. Q allows them to articulate their own positions, which allows for the various contextual considerations of socioeconomic class, while remaining transparent about the mission of the blog, which is to engender school lunch reform.

Mrs. Q's advocacy on behalf of her students extends beyond visual representations of the food being served in school cafeterias. Part of determining the stakes for these students includes careful reflections on class and the conditions that lead to students' grateful consumption of these meals. "Socio-economic status makes it hard for these kids to experience food in the way that 'rich' people like us get to. So when these students are given food, they just say 'thank you'" ("Socio-economic status," February 2, 2010). On February 17, 2010, she posted a "School Lunch Wish List," which includes, in part:

> Offer a piece of fruit at every meal in place of a fruit cup, fruit juice or icee. The fruit part of the meal should be actual fruit and it should be sliced so that kids can grab it and eat it. Allow parents, educators, and students access to nutritional information for each meal. It can be online. […] Remove pre-packaged items (bagel dogs, peanut butter sandwiches, cheese sandwiches, etc) from the menu and replace with casseroles, soups, wraps, or fresh-made PB&Js (all of which are cost-efficient and can be made in very large batches). […] Every school incorporates new nutrition-based cooking curriculum to students of all ages and requires the students to enter the kitchen and learn basic snack and meal prep. […] Teach

> students where their food comes from by taking a trip to a farm or planting a school garden so that they can be invested in food and have an experience in DIRT!

These are lofty goals indeed, and perhaps at odds with the realities of the ways in which government subsidy funds and commodity foods are allocated. The average cost of a school lunch is two dollars, depending on the expense level of the district, including the value of the commodities (which averages about 10% of the cost of the meal). The changes Mrs. Q suggests would take significant financial support from both the community and the local, state, and federal governments. But in presenting this wish list, Mrs. Q has made a critical first step: she has provided a list of changes that are possible, making visible the potential for change. Indeed, at the root of Mrs. Q's project is raising awareness of the reality of what school lunch looks like and presenting the possible, more desirable alternatives for our schools and our children. The stakes are improved health for children and communities, as well as a potential disruption of the stranglehold commodity foods has on the American diet.

One of the ways in which Mrs. Q raises awareness of the alternatives to poor-quality school lunches is through her "Titanium spork awards," a monthly ritual in which Mrs. Q recognizes someone who is working to change school food.[54] Previous winners include Jamie Oliver; Laura DeSantis, the nutrition director of Marblehead Community

[54] The ritual started when Mrs. Q received a complimentary gift of three titanium sporks from ThinkGeek after mentioning them on her blog. Rather than keep them (apart from one for a memento), she offered readers the chance to vote on school-lunch reformers they deemed worthy of the trophy. The initial two offerings were so successful that Mrs. Q requested — and ThinkGeek supplied — enough sporks to continue the monthly award indefinitely.

Charter Public School in Massachusetts; journalist Ed Bruske, who spent weeks at a time in school kitchens in Berkeley, CA, Boulder, CO, and Washington, D.C., and chronicled his observations on theslowcook.com; and Dana Waldow, a San Francisco mother of three who helped overhaul that school district's school-lunch offerings. By making these activists visible, Mrs. Q provides a model for the ways in which the public at large can involve themselves on a local level.

Through the course of the project, Mrs. Q examines the problem of school lunch from every angle possible. Indeed, at the outset, she argues for the absolute need to think critically about every aspect of school lunch:

> [W]hen we look at under-performing schools and we want to change those numbers, we need to question *everything*. Teachers' skills, abilities, and training are often addressed in the media as a big part of the picture. […] But nowhere have I ever seen anyone think about what we offer children for lunch. Let's think about what we give students *to ingest*. For instance, I personally enjoy eating hot dogs maybe every 4-6 months, mostly in the summer cooked on a grill. Also I eat them when I go to the ballpark as a special treat. But I wonder if we should give a child a hot dog lunch and then ask them to take the ISAT (state test). ("Dialogue," January 21, 2010)

Other entries find Mrs. Q close reading her students' lunch break, from the time allotted to line up, get their food, open the packaging, eat, dispose of the waste, and line up to leave (20 minutes). She underscores the importance of packaging that accommodates children's fine motor skills, as well as keeps waste in check, while also making note of

the lack of opportunity for commensality among the children at lunchtime: "Lunch is a break for students to chat with their friends in an informal setting," ("Time," February 15, 2010). Mrs. Q also utilizes guest authors in order to provide a more complete portrait of the school lunch problem. A guest entry authored by a science journalism major at Columbia College Chicago outlines the major points of the Child Nutrition Act ("Guest Blogger: Child Nutrition Act," March 21, 2010) and offers suggestions for how to take action. Other guest bloggers offer a picture of what school lunch looks like in their regions, with writers submitting from Washington state, Denver, Croatia, Canada, and Japan. Still others submit editorials on reducing school cafeteria waste, combating childhood obesity, the Whole Foods-spearheaded "Salad Bar In Every School" project, and a profile of an Austin middle-school math teacher who offers a culinary science elective at his school. Such locally focused entries help underscore the importance of grassroots efforts within readers' communities. Meanwhile, Mrs. Q maintains an active Twitter account in which she directs readers to the various other conversations about school lunch taking place all over the Internet. All of these varied portraits and portals help Mrs. Q to construct the multidimensional discursive matrix that harnesses the myriad dimensions of the school lunch issue.

But at the center of this matrix, at least within the context of the first year or so of *Fed Up With Lunch*, is the then-anonymous Midwestern schoolteacher who converted the project of raising awareness about school lunch into an embodied experience by eating the lunches in question (162 of them, to be exact). This intimate relationship with the contested lunches allows her to weave her own experiences into the narrative of school

lunch, from reflections on the lunches of her blue-collar childhood to the digestive disruptions inspired by the contemporary school lunches.

But why did she choose to blog anonymously? The original intent of remaining anonymous is fairly pragmatic: Wu wanted to avoid being discovered and fired. She writes, "I'm not a hero, but I am a whistleblower. But instead of calling a 'tip line,' I've shouted it to thousands of people. Oops" ("On Being a Chicken," January 17, 2010). As her traffic grows to an average of 1,000-4,000 hits per day, Mrs. Q realizes that she has power in her anonymity ("What's to come," March 7, 2010); indeed, by actually eating the lunches anonymously rather than performing the role of whistleblowing muckraker, Mrs. Q engendered transparency that allowed her to underscore the fact that school lunch is a social justice issue for the least among us while simultaneously opening up the discourse of school lunch reform to her readers.

Now that Wu has finished eating school lunches and revealed her identity, *Fed Up With Lunch* has undergone a shift in its approach. Wu has started a "Lunch Literature Book Club" on the site; the first title under discussion is Janet Poppendieck's *Free For All* (2010). In addition to their participation in the book club, readers can upload photographs of their home-packed lunches onto the Flickr group, and participate in open threads taking up topics such as American food culture (March 20, 2010), the use of high fructose corn syrup in processed foods (February 13, 2010), readers' favorite lunches (January 22, 2011), and challenges to write school-lunch related haiku (November 20, 2010). Her book, *Fed Up With Lunch: How One Anonymous School Teacher Survived a Year of School Lunch* (Chronicle Books), was be released on October 5, 2011. The

lunches featured on her site now comprise those that she packs for her son and herself, and prominently feature farm-share vegetables and gluten- and dairy-free foods. While she takes her own stand against Big Food in the interest of the children, through her sustained interrogation of school lunch she also allows for her attached community of readers to mediate their own positions on Big Food while also inspiring and empowering them to get involved in their own local communities to effect change in their children's lunchrooms, from advocating greater emphasis on fruits and vegetables to eliminating flavored milks.

As both the Pioneer Woman and Gluten-Free Girl demonstrate, to say "yes" to food — Big Food or otherwise — while cultivating a readership community has complicated and problematic consequences for those attached communities. The Pioneer Woman brand is dependent upon the homogenizing effects of corporate food because that rhetoric of sameness is what attracts readers and revenue. Conversely, Shauna Ahern relies on a discourse of whole foods and scratch cooking to engender connection with her audience for *Gluten-Free Girl and the Chef*, but that connection is ruptured by Ahern's various partnerships with corporate food entities who compensate Ahern for blog entries extolling their products. Mrs. Q, through her anonymity and because her project is advocacy- and reform-minded rather than profit generating, enacts a more direct interrogation of the intrusive influence of Big Food in school lunches and argues for grassroots consumer activism. For Mrs. Q, the goal of connection within communities is to act on behalf of underprivileged schoolchildren, to understand them as more than just repositories for empty commodity calories and who deserve better from the adults in their

lives. The stakes here are clear: by reforming the school-lunch system, we have the opportunity to teach new generations of citizens to value food in its unadulterated state, not as something to be choked down in 20 minutes. If we teach children the connections between planting seeds and harvesting food, we equip them with the skills to make similar connections in other areas of their lives.

For some cooking communities, though, to connect with one another in the interest of effecting change requires less flexibility than the blogosphere can provide. For the feminist and vegetarian communities comprising the Bloodroot collective and the Post Punk Kitchen, to claim one's power as a citizen rather than as a consumer requires nothing less than a complete ideological turning away from animal products and, by extension, the entire corporate supply system. To connect with the land and local farmers, to cook from scratch without animal products, and to enjoy a meal at a communal table is to comment upon structures of power that may, on their surface, have nothing at all to do with food.

CHAPTER 2:

"We wanted a new recipe altogether": Feminist Vegetarian Ideologies

"Food would have to be viewed not merely as a commodity to be rationalized or a set of nutrients to be metabolized, but as a medium of communication, a symbol of a whole way of life, *an edible dynamic*." – Warren Belasco, *Appetite for Change* (1989)

"Recipes reflect the society that produced them." – Jessamyn Neuhaus, *Manly Meals and Mom's Home Cooking* (2003)

In the summer of 2010, the New England Quilt Museum in Lowell, Massachusetts, featured an exhibit called "Women's Writes: Signature Quilts and Their Stories." The exhibit showcased a dozen or more quilts from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, assembled and signed by women, often in the interest of fundraising for social concerns like temperance, abolition, and the Red Cross. These quilts on display were made as a form of political expression in an era that predated suffrage, but also served as a way for a community to honor a woman embarking upon marriage or leaving the community, for example. Quilt historian Ricky Clark, in a symposium paper dedicated to nineteenth-century signature quilts, argues that "women made friendship or album quilts to reify community. By making them, women transformed personal relationships into visible, tangible form" (77). The women who made these signature quilts used the tools available to them in order to represent themselves and their concerns, be it ushering a woman into a new stage in her life or taking a stand on contemporary political issues, encompassing both the local and the global, with a material object as the evidence that would outlive them.

Anne Bower, in the introduction to *Recipes for Reading*, briefly makes the connection between quilts and cookbooks, as well as diaries and letters, as readable material artifacts of women's lives (4-5); in this chapter I will argue that the cookbooks published by the Bloodroot collective and the Post Punk Kitchen serve the same function as signature quilts: they serve as the tangible, material representation of a community of women with political, social, and cultural concerns at their center, who choose to use the tools available to them in order to create the kind of world in which they wish to live. Both use their cookbooks to represent their politics and define their communities while also pushing against the hegemony of Big Food, making food the site at which the personal and political intersect. The recipes generated within these respective projects are meant to communicate a profound distaste and objection to the dehumanizing, alienating effects of industrial agriculture and the cruelty they see as inherent to the use of animal products. And yet, for all of their countercultural bona fides, their respective projects take a hegemonic turn, as both cookbooks reveal profound gaps in considering the issues of class and ethnicity as it pertains to their respective food-based activism.

Both the Bloodroot and Post Punk Kitchen's projects have their roots in the countercuisine described by Warren Belasco in *Appetite for Change: How the Counterculture Took on the Food Industry* (1989, 2006). While Belasco's study functions as an elegy for the countercuisine, claiming that it was eventually co-opted by the patriarchal forces of Big Food and repackaged in the form of mass-produced veggie burgers and herbal teas, I argue that both Bloodroot and Post Punk Kitchen carry on those early activists' projects, enacting radical resistance and crafting oppositional, radical

feminist-vegetarian identities that are reified (à la Clark) within the pages of their respective cookbooks. In many ways, the women of Bloodroot have remained true to the counterculture's originary goals of removing oneself from the mainstream in order to enact a radical feminist countercuisine via a feminist community of their own making that seeks to redefine women's relationship to food and their bodies. In the Post Punk Kitchen, we see the same drive for community, for balancing personal pleasure with global concerns, and the revulsion toward highly processed, chemical-infused food. Rather than removing themselves from the mainstream, though, the Post Punk Kitchen works from within it, harnessing technology and the cookbook market in order to recruit new members to its unruly flock. Both entities work to create an "a visceral link between the personal and the political," in the process representing themselves as dynamic, revolutionary communities that are more than just anonymous consumers of food and goods (Belasco 217).

Many cookbooks speak in terms of "revolution" when it comes to our relationship with the food supply and the politics surrounding it. Some are rooted in the counterculture, others have altruistic and/or environmental concerns at their core; all of them advocate a (mostly) vegetarian or vegan diet as a means of achieving their various radical ends, which range from solving world hunger to saving the planet. The roots of this discourse can be traced to Francis Moore Lappé, who is arguably the bellwether of the revolutionary countercultural cookbook.

In the late 1960s, Lappé was a graduate student in social work at the University of California at Berkeley, where she spent "long hours in the U.C. Berkeley library

uncovering facts about the global food supply that turned [her] world upside down" (Lappé xv). The result of that life-altering research was *Diet for a Small Planet* (1971), a (nominal) cookbook that, in its original edition, argues for North Americans to shift to a plant-based diet in order to make more food available to Third World countries. In it, she exposes the waste built into the North American grain-based livestock system, and suggests a way to eliminate world hunger by directing those grain-based resources elsewhere. Relying on reams of data and couched in a scientific discourse as opposed to a more "mystical" one in line with the various countercultural revolutions taking place at the time (Belasco 58, Inness 95), Lappé focused on protein complementarity within a plant-based diet as a means of convincing an audience skeptical of cutting meat from their diets. Lappé's work in *Diet for a Small Planet* is Belasco's edible dynamic in action: "In characteristically countercultural style, she merged the political and the personal by combining economics and autobiography, consumerism and therapy, sober biochemistry and tasty recipes. Like most ecologists, she thought in terms of a single world system transcending petty national boundaries and of the interrelatedness of all species" (57).

In later editions of the book, Lappé modified her argument, stating that Third World countries didn't need America's grain so much as they needed political reform, and that we should all practice "living democracy" in the interest of effecting worldwide change via our daily routines (Belasco 58). In many ways, *Diet for a Small Planet* served as Lappé's springboard for a larger humanitarian mission; she has founded three national organizations dedicated to hunger, poverty, and environmental concerns and in 2008, she was named the James Beard Foundation's Humanitarian of the Year. The important thing

to remember about Lappé and *Diet for a Small Planet*, according to Belasco, is that "at the same time as she advocated radical political change, she also promised personal adventure, growth, and liberation through culinary adventures" (58). While Lappé does incorporate personal stakes and even pleasure into her eating plan, the greater goal is in the interest of humanity itself.

In late 2009, two cookbooks with nearly identical agendas hit bookshelves. Food journalist and cookbook author Mark Bittman, previously known for his *New York Times* column "The Minimalist" and his *How to Cook Everything* cookbooks,[55] published *Food Matters*, a "guide to conscious eating" in service to a green agenda with the added benefit of better individual health. Bittman advocates for a diet heavy in vegetables and grains and very minimal meat; in fact, Bittman suggests a "vegan until dinner" diet, arguing that to reduce meat intake is to effect a profound change in the environment, while also reaping numerous physical rewards. Similarly, actress and animal rights activist Alicia Silverstone's *The Kind Diet: A Simple Guide to Feeling Great, Losing Weight, and Saving the Planet*, has both personal and global concerns:

> *The Kind Diet* will give you tons of energy, mental clarity, gorgeous skin, and a zest for life you won't want to miss. […] So this kindness to yourself is paramount. And it doesn't stop there. This kindness extends to the earth itself; because it requires less fuel, water, and other precious resources, a plant-based diet is much lighter on the planet. […] You will

[55] Part of what Adam Gopnik describes in *The New Yorker* as "the grammatical turn" in cookbooks, where the tone shifts from the chatty, confessional, anecdote-driven ethos of female-authored cookbooks to a more instructional, how-to approach.

> see that the Kind Diet reduces planetary suffering on all levels; following a plant-based diet is just about the greenest thing you can do. (6-7)

Like Bittman's *Food Matters*, there are immediate bodily benefits to the eating plan, but Silverstone makes the global implications explicit as well. Silverstone clearly speaks to a female audience, from exhorting her readers to "treat yourself like a total goddess"; to attempting to identify with her fellow wives and mothers; and designating one of the phases of her diet as the highly female-coded "Flirt," which constitutes small modifications to one's diet. The "Vegan" phase includes foregoing meat, dairy, and other animal products but also using convenience foods and meat substitutes, while "Superhero," the recipes for which are relegated to their own section of the cookbook, is a diet rooted in macrobiotics and relying entirely on whole, unprocessed foods; in designating this selfless and super-ethical diet plan "Superhero," Silverstone echoes the rhetoric of duty aimed at women with which Neuhaus contends in her survey of 20th century cookbooks.

These texts by Lappé, Bittman, and Silverstone trace the arc of the cookbook's rhetorical move out of the kitchen, an inherently gendered domestic space, toward a discourse of food that has revolutionary global implications.[56] Where such a move was groundbreaking and rooted in a countercultural consciousness for Lappé, the globally conscious cookbook authors of the past half-decade speak to mainstream desires to "go green," while also guaranteeing that the individual eater also stands to gain from following their respective plans; this movement mirrors the absorption of the

[56] With thanks to Kelli Soika.

countercuisine into the mainstream Belasco depicts in his study. The cookbooks emanating from Bloodroot and the Post Punk Kitchen (PPK), however, deploy a countercultural consciousness that drives their existence. Where Bloodroot is separatist and "take us or leave us," PPK is expansive and inviting, jokingly threatening global vegan domination. Bloodroot's feminist community is the reason for the cookbooks, and those artifacts exist to represent said community. The PPK exists to represent veganism, and the cookbooks they publish are intended to spread the gospel of a practice of veganism that serves to interrogate the structures of power within our consumer culture. Both are revolutionary positions but not without their limitations, in that the discourse of revolution and rejection of the patriarchy and hegemony of Big Food and animal products, both communities fail to engage meaningfully with issues of class and ethnicity. As such, the oppositional, separatist identities set forth are figured as *too* oppositional and separatist, leaving no space for those who may benefit the most from such revolutionary ideas.

Ethical Vegetarianism and a Feminist Utopia

"Feminism is the politics which informed the creation of Bloodroot and our lives," write Selma Miriam and Noel Furie in the dedication to *The Best of Bloodroot: Volume One, Vegetarian Recipes*. In that dedication, Miriam and Furie describe their admiration for second-wave feminist icons Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin[57]

[57] Andrea Dworkin was a radical second-wave feminist thinker, speaker, and writer best known for her criticism of pornography, which she linked to rape and violence against women. She is described in

and confess that they named their rescued cats after the women. With this admission, Miriam and Furie set forth in no uncertain terms the foundation of their belief system as women and as the proprietors of America's only feminist bookstore/vegetarian restaurant, and they devote the introductory materials of this and *Volume Two, Vegan Recipes* to further elucidating this position. The recipes contained within the two volumes representing the restaurant's best dishes are relatively unremarkable, including peach cobbler, green tomato pie, four-cheese macaroni, greens with black-eyed peas, various dumplings, soups, and salads. The ingredients are not obscure and are easily procured at a grocery with a well-stocked produce section. The cookbooks do not represent any particular style or genre of cooking; rather, they serve two purposes: to promote ethical, feminist vegetarianism and to represent the feminist community rooted in the small house on Ferris Street in Bridgeport, Connecticut.

Bloodroot was established as a feminist collective in 1977, "because [Miriam and Furie] wanted and needed a community […] where we could live our values as feminists" (*One* i-ii). In addition to a vegetarian restaurant featuring ethnic-inspired, home-cooked fare, the collective also established a feminist bookstore, one of the few feminist bookstores remaining in operation today. In fact, diners at the restaurant can browse the bookstore's shelves while waiting on their food. In addition to the restaurant and bookstore operations, Bloodroot hosts frequent events including weaving classes, knitting clinics, and "cook's choice" cooking classes in which patrons pay $15 to learn to cook

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Bloodroot as "generous and brilliant." Catharine MacKinnon is a feminist lawyer who worked with Dworkin to explore the possibility of using federal civil rights laws to combat pornography. She is considered a pioneer in the areas of sexual harassment, pornography, and international law.

their favorite Bloodroot recipe, as well as speaking engagements with many of the authors featured on the bookstore's shelves. Bloodroot establishes itself through these various aspects of its existence as a staunchly feminist salon that embodies its activism primarily through the production of vegetarian, vegan, ethnically inspired cuisine. Indeed, the most crucial aspect of Bloodroot's definition of feminism centers on the plate, and the women go to great lengths to define "feminist food":

> [W]e chose to be vegetarians because animal rights were a necessary part of a feminist agenda. Gradually, the food became more and more important to us. We don't serve either the outsize portion all-you-can-eat stir fried whatever, nor do we want to make our food into architectural contortions topped with obscure sauces. […] We want ingredients to be from local farms (when possible) and grown without pesticides and herbicides. We want to enjoy it ourselves. (ii)

In keeping with the argument of Carol J. Adams in *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A feminist-vegetarian critical theory* (1990), part of Bloodroot's definition of feminism includes vegetarianism. Adams (and, by extension, Bloodroot) believes that the consumption of meat is an extension of patriarchal power over women, that meat represents a patriarchal text that conflates the consumption of flesh with the consumption of women; Adams also argues that eating meat is closely aligned with maleness. To eat meat is to align oneself with power, whiteness, and with the rich. Meat, Adams claims, becomes an "absent referent" (54) in that in the transformation from living creature to "meat," a chicken becomes "poultry," a cow becomes "beef," a pig becomes "pork," and

so on. Adams then draws an equivalence between this rhetorical shift and woman as absent referent in mass-media objectification, such as when Frank Perdue asks male viewers of his chicken commercial whether they are "breast or thigh [men]." Therefore, for Bloodroot to eschew the consumption of meat is to reject the function of meat as a patriarchal text.

Additionally, the feminist dinner plate abstains from excessive quantities of food in favor of moderate, reasonable portions. The disavowal of "architectural contortions" and "obscure sauces" serves as a distancing from the more masculine world of haute cuisine and molecular gastronomy.[58] The emphasis upon local and organic ingredients suggests an ecofeminist ethos, as does the importance of a seasonal menu, which "change[s] to reflect the time of year" (*One* i). In one of their earlier cookbooks, *The Political Palate* (1980), Miriam and Furie assert that, "[f]eminist food is seasonal. […] Our lives are so disconnected from organic or natural timekeeping and the best efforts of the earth, that once we enter the sterile world of pre-packaged supermarkets it is hard to remember that strawberries and tomatoes are not worth eating in January and that onion soup and oranges don't make sense in August" (*PP* xii). This philosophy predates Pollan by nearly 30 years; however, the stakes for Bloodroot are more profound. While Pollan seeks to wrestle the food supply from Big Food in all its forms in service to a pastoral — and perhaps even Romantic — vision of whole foods, Bloodroot sees a connection to the

[58] Women hold ten percent of the executive chef positions in the United States. See Marx, Rebecca Flint. "Bitchin' confidential." *Time Out New York* 12 January 2009. Web. 7 Mar 2011. <http://newyork.timeout.com/articles/restaurants-bars/70474/bitchin-confidential>. In it, Marx argues that women are typically associated with sweets, pastry chefs, and comfort food/home cooking while men are more daring, are the mercurial head chefs, and parlay an interest in chemistry and technology into a practice of molecular gastronomy.

rhythms and cycles of the earth as a deeply feminist state of being. Rather than invoking biological immanence per de Beauvoir or drawing upon the historical equivalence of women with the chaos of nature (Bordo 33), Bloodroot's emphasis on seasonality reflects an awareness of and responsibility to humanity's place on the landscape. Not only is this an ecofeminist "rejection of duality and an embracing of the interconnectivity of creation," but also an acknowledgment of the subversive power of living close to the land in the interest of a larger feminist project (Fitzgerald 11).

Much of Bloodroot's philosophy is grounded in an ecofeminist ethos. In her analysis of Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*, Almila Ozdek argues that the novel enacts an ecofeminist critique of capitalist ownership of the land. She writes: "The way nature is transformed defines the character of a culture and its individuals, how they look at themselves and at the outer world. […] one can argue that earth functions like language: its dynamics may be determined by hegemonic policies and it may even act as the very tool that implements these policies" (63). This idea applies to the women of Bloodroot in that sourcing organic produce from area farmers is not only a rejection of Big Food, but also a rejection of the drive for conquest, possession, and control that fuels it and the broader patriarchal culture. To serve only seasonal food is not just an aesthetic choice, it is an affirmation of a feminist identity that is firmly rooted in a healing connection with nature, a fusion of feminism and Slow Food, a direct contradiction to those who argue against such a commingling. Just as Belasco argues that, "like language, a cuisine is a medium by which a society establishes its special identity" (44), through their emphasis on vegetarian, organic, seasonal foods, the women of Bloodroot "write [themselves] a life

that is liberated from the male gaze" (Ozdek 72) and put into practice a feminist version of the Slow Food movement.

In addition to an emphasis on seasonality and a reconnection with the cycles of the earth, Bloodroot also prominently features ethnic cuisines on its menu as an expression of the collective's feminism. In an interview with the *The New York Times* (1999), Miriam states,

> We decided to have food that was representative of a lot of different peoples from a lot of different lands, we believed that would be one aspect of making this food feminist. Also, at this time, we were very influenced by friends who were animal-rights vegetarians, and even though I was not a vegetarian at that time, it all seemed to just come together, to combine as many different ethnic foods as we could find that in our view could be thought of as feminist.

A few examples of these ethnic dishes are curried lentil soup (*One*, 117), potato kugel (*One*, 194), Brazilian feijoada (*One*, 202), Armenian madzoon soup (*One*, 241), and Syrian baked stuffed eggplant (*One*, 272). Ultimately, though, the feminist food is secondary to the cookbooks' primary function of representing the feminist community assembled at Bloodroot, one with very specific dimensions and ideologies.

Part of establishing a feminist community is to define the boundaries of feminism for its participants. Miriam and Furie write, "As feminists, we needed a place for women to go to be treated with respect and not be hassled. From the beginning, there have been men who have understood the context we wished to create, some of whom have become

good friends" (*One* i). This assumes an always-already contentious relationship with men, that the perpetrators of "hassling" are universally men, most of which do not or will not understand Bloodroot's context. They go on to argue that, "A feminist community encourages each woman to figure out who she can be. Obviously such a community presupposes feminist values, so there is an assumed agreement on some political issues: you can't be anti-choice, anti-affirmative action, racist, pro-pornography or homophobic and be a feminist" (ii). This declaration figures Bloodroot as a second-wave stronghold, evoking the sex-wars split that divided feminism in the 1980s and is perhaps even representative of an archaic version of feminism. This declaration also suggests that sex- and pornography-positive feminists do not have a place in the Bloodroot community and that any pro-pornography attitudes must be kept in the closet.

Of equal importance to the women of Bloodroot is that they derive pleasure from the food they produce, to eat what they want and savor it. To seek out and savor the pleasure of eating within a culture that shames women for indulging in the enjoyment of food is a transgressive act indeed (Bordo 56-7). Miriam and Furie write in *The Political Palate*, "As for counting calories and watching the waistline, we're not interested. Dieting has been an especially oppressive masochism expected of women in recent years" (*PP* xviii-ix). Again we see a rejection of the policing behaviors patriarchal hegemony enacts upon women's bodies, a rejection also manifested on the walls of Bloodroot itself in a sign that reads, "Because all women are victims of Fat Oppression and out of respect for women of size, we would appreciate your refraining from agonizing aloud over the calorie count in our food" (*One*, xiv). Taken at face value, the

sign serves as a declaration of independence from the beauty industry's reign of terror over women's bodies and establishes Bloodroot as a safe haven from destructive messages about weight and bodies. The notice also recommends two titles: *Shadow on a Tightrope* (Schoenfelder and Wieser 1983) and *The Obsession* (Chernin 1981) are respectively, a collection of writings that serve as the foundation of the Fat Acceptance movement and a feminist analysis of Western culture's preoccupation with thinness. By recommending these titles (which are, presumably, available on the shelves of the bookstore), Bloodroot provides its customers with the information they need to better understand the reasoning behind this admonition to forego complaining about calorie counts, as well as to better understand the scope of Bloodroot's feminism. However, this sign is problematic in that it singles out fat women at the same time that it is unwilling to call them fat and presumes that only fat women would find complaints about calories offensive, damaging, or triggering. This sign is but one example of the rhetorical contortions Bloodroot makes in order to represent its feminism and push back against the patriarchy, while also revealing blind spots in its own ideology.

Once Miriam and Furie clear space for themselves by defining and establishing the dimensions of their feminism, they then go about the process of materially representing their community. There are 188 women listed in the first two pages of both cookbooks, women who worked at Bloodroot in some capacity over the collective's 30-plus years in operation. The acknowledgments declare that these workers are the most important part of Bloodroot, and go on to identify a few of these women and expand upon their roles at Bloodroot, which underscores their particular importance to the

collective. In addition to emphasizing the importance of Bloodroot's workers, Miriam and Furie also make clear that they value those who dine at Bloodroot, regardless of how frequently they patronize the restaurant. "These customers are our friends and this is our community" (*One* i), they write, commenting that to be a frequent customer of Bloodroot's implies some degree of buy-in to the collective's philosophies and practices. The logos of the cookbooks also speaks to the collective's attempts to reify its community: where most mainstream cookbooks privilege photographs of the food, Bloodroot's cookbooks privilege photos of its workers and guests, as well as of the physical space, which are interspersed throughout. The authors also take great care to describe their space, particularly the wall bearing a "unique collection of many, many old photos of women" (*One* i), marking the space and the collective's legacy as unmistakably female and feminist.

A crucial part of Bloodroot's community is the interaction between customer and worker. Bloodroot eschews waitressing and tipping, which guarantees the workers equal status among one another and also with customers. A late, brief essay in *Volume One* states, "As feminists we believe that each person should be in charge of the maintenance tasks required of her daily life as much as possible. For an able-bodied person to expect another to clean up after her/him seems disrespectful and condescending" (329). Bloodroot erases the customer/server power dynamic in its restaurant by reducing "service" to its barest form. Instead of placing an order with a waitress, the customer approaches a worker-cum-traffic manager (or gatekeeper) seated at a desk, reads the specials on a nearby blackboard, places her order, pays for it, and retrieves it when called.

After eating, the customer clears her own table. Within the structure of the restaurant's staff, the collective opts to "make use of the particular skills individual women have" (v); Rather than taking a Fordist approach of plug-and-play assembly-line workers, Bloodroot allows a woman's personality to dictate what role she plays, and no one is too high up on the food chain to mop floors and wash dishes. These staffing practices honor the personhood of the worker, another radical departure from the dominant cultural paradigm of restaurant work, as well as putting into action the collective's feminist philosophy through the dynamic of the physical space of the restaurant.

Proudly self-proclaimed Luddites, the Bloodroot collective makes no secret of the fact that they abhor technology and its infiltration into American lives. In the acknowledgements page, which appears in both volumes, Miram and Furie state, "We've entered the electronic age kicking and screaming," but thank Carolanne Curry for setting up the restaurant's website, as well as handling other business concerns. According to the restaurant website,

> Someone came by the restaurant the other day and told us they had thought that there must be new owners, because we have a web site now. Rest assured, little has changed since we began this journey. We are still Luddites. We recently bought a touch tone phone because we had to, the old rotary phone suited us just fine, but, to order some of our supplies meant we have to go through those awful automated voice systems, our rotary phone just wouldn't work. (http://www.bloodroot.com/history.htm)

Additionally, while the restaurant does have an email address, the website makes it clear that it is merely decorative and very rarely used. This sustained rejection of the innovations embraced by mainstream culture figures Bloodroot as a bastion of the counterculture intent on preserving local, human connections, while also keeping itself separate in order to maintain its feminist project with as little compromise as possible.[59]

Indeed, there are notable links between the countercultural food movement described by Belasco and the early-1970s inception of Bloodroot. "Ecology was a new word and a new movement," write Miriam and Furie. "Of course it was feminist to embrace it" (viii). Belasco describes the countercultural revitalization of the concept of "ecology" thusly:

> In the late 1960s, ecology broadened from a baroque branch of biology into an interdisciplinary embrace of the whole earth. […] those who felt rejected by their own country could take heart in being citizens of the Planet. As patriots of this wider polity they could feel righteously outraged by what they saw as the root cause of planetary problems: technology. (25)

With this rejection of technology and a revulsion for the oppressions of patriarchy, Miriam and Furie (along with the other two cofounders of Bloodroot, Betsy Beavan and Pat Shea) decided that they "didn't want a piece of the pie; we wanted a new recipe altogether" (viii). This hunger for an entirely new recipe for being in the world speaks to

[59] The restaurant does have a regularly updated Facebook page, maintained by Miriam's Dallas, Texas-based daughter.

the hope, potential, and anger stemming from the late '60s/early '70s counterculture, while also eventually embodying the three main elements of Belasco's countercuisine: A "radical consumerism" that rejected "plastic" food; a therapeutic component that recovered food and made it more enjoyable through, among other techniques, ethnic cuisines; and the "organic paradigm, which posited a radically decentralized infrastructure consisting of communal farms, cooperative groceries, and hip restaurants" (4).

"Radically decentralized" is certainly an apt descriptor for the way Bloodroot chooses to exist, as evidenced in its strategies for distancing itself from the mainstream. The collective named its independent press Anomaly, and the copyright page for both cookbooks includes a definition of the word: "Something out of keeping, especially with accepted notions of fitness or order. Exceptional, unusual, nonconforming, surprising, something that refuses to submit to classification or explanation." Particularly telling is the authors' declaration that their favorite book is Dworkin's *Right Wing Women* (1983), stating, "Our country still wants to separate women into the political left or right" (ix); in that text, Dworkin argues that the right wing offers false security to women, who then "agitate for their own subordination." The decidedly left-leaning Miriam and Furie go on to explain that in *Pure Lust* (1984), feminist theologian Mary Daly argues that women "must cherish" their status as the "quintessential other" and to "bond with women across

ethnic, race and class lines" (ix). This self-othering echoes in Miriam and Furie's choice to serve vegetarian ethnic cuisine.[60]

Part of Bloodroot's self-othering also entails a distancing from the medical establishment. Rather than participate in the United States' health-care and insurance industries, which treat illness via a regimen of "slash, burn and poison" in the interest of "extend[ing] 'life' at any cost" (xvii). Miriam and Furie choose instead to rely on homeopathy, as well as practicing yoga, spinning, weaving, gardening, and political activism to stay healthy (xvii-xviii). Citing *The China Study* (2005), Miriam and Furie argue that excessive consumption of meat and dairy seriously compromises human health, as well as tacitly supports corporations that pollute the earth and the food supply with unnecessary chemicals and antibiotics. The alternatives, they argue, again anticipate Michael Pollan, albeit in the interest of a feminist edible dynamic: "Check ingredients on labels, join Community Supported Agriculture, and buy organic food as much as possible. […] Eat a minimal amount of dairy and animal protein, or none at all" (xvii). "We are fiercely political in every aspect of our lives," write Miriam and Furie; these connections among feminism, health, and veganism are more fully expanded in *The Best of Bloodroot Volume Two: Vegan Recipes*, allowing for an even more concentrated representation of the collective's political concerns and amplifies them to reveal a global, feminist perspective on a common good.

[60] See Belasco 27, Pollan 143-44. Both authors underscore the countercuisine's emphasis on identification with "brown food" as an expression of solidarity with the world's oppressed people.

Volume Two begins with an essay titled "Resistance is Fertile" by recipe consultant Lagusta Yearwood. In it, Yearwood argues that the use of coconut milk as an alterative to dairy communicates "precisely why feminists and all thinking people should not eat meat" (*Two* i). The essay is not a compendium of the practical uses of coconut milk, but an essay on *why* to use coconut milk instead of dairy. To support her argument, Yearwood cites Alice Walker, who wrote in the preface to Marjorie Spiegel's *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery* (1988) that "The animals of the world exist for their own reasons. They were not made for humans any more than black people were made for whites or women for men." Yearwoood's use of this quote serves to align the consumption of dairy with collusion with patriarchy and slavery, rendering the practice ethically and morally corrupt.

The use of coconut milk, Yearwood argues, stems from the need to reframe our approach to veganism. She declares veganism an alternative culture and a way to cook "from a political standpoint" that engenders creativity and resistance, hence the phrase "resistance is fertile," a slogan borrowed from Ruth Ozeki's novel, *All Over Creation* (2003), a family saga centering on genetically modified potatoes. For Yearwood, veganism's ethics extend beyond animal rights:

> Most food, even most food in health food stores, travels many hundreds of miles and is distributed by large agri-business corporations who often have political views I do not share (e.g. discrimination against lesbians and gay men, pro-globalization politics, exploitative marketing practices in 'developing countries,' etc). […] When vegetarians and vegans limit

> politics to the realm of animal rights, we are doing ourselves a disservice. […] [F]eminism, progressive politics, animal rights, and environmentalism work best when they work together. (vi-vii)

By this logic, then, to go vegan is to extend the opt-out ethos practiced by the Bloodroot cooperative. Veganism is more than just eliminating animal products from one's diet and consumer goods; it is also a matrix of ideologies that critique patriarchy, the food industrial complex, and numerous other political practices deemed unsavory by progressive feminists.

The women of Bloodroot enact a feminist ecology, which is different from ecofeminism in that it imparts a sense of cultivation, a utopian space in which "women are teaching other women how to spin and knit, the air is laced with onions and garlic frying, books are being bought and discussed, the garden is teeming with gorgeous little green treasures. It is a site of resistance to the culture of violence and mediocrity that is the mainstream world" (*Two*, ix). To that end, *The Best of Bloodroot Volumes One* and *Two* are more than simply cookbooks; indeed, the lay reader may wonder what an anti-pornography screed has to do with a recipe for okra gumbo. An anonymous Amazon.com reviewer of *The Political Palate* put it best with the comment, "It feels like a parody of that candy ad: 'You got your politics in my cook book! You got your recipes in my manifesto!'"[61] This humorously expressed tension speaks to the nature of these artifacts: they are meant neither as cookbooks nor as political manifestoes. Rather, they are an

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[61] wiredweird. "Customer Review." *Amazon.com*. Amazon.com, 10 December 2007. Web. 7 Mar 2011. <http://www.amazon.com/review/ROJHAQDMMWXDV/>.

attempt by the collective to represent and reify the community situated within the nondescript bookstore-cum-restaurant. Much like the friendship quilts discussed by Clark, the *Best of Bloodroot* cookbooks serve as an attempt to make their community tangible, even while they strive to keep themselves separate from the mainstream.

"All We Believe in Is Punk Rock and Tofu": The Post Punk Kitchen and Representing Veganism

Conversely, an engagement with mainstream culture is essential to the Post Punk Kitchen's project. From 2003 to 2005, Isa Chandra Moskowitz, along with Terry Hope Romero, hosted a cable-access cooking show called *Post Punk Kitchen* out of her tiny Brooklyn kitchen. In addition to Moskowitz and Romero, the show often featured punk bands who played live and sometimes helped prepare the recipes. For example, Episode 2 features Brooklyn's Made Out of Babies, the members of which assisted Moskowitz and Romero with the preparation of a Valentine's Day meal. The band members, sat on a couch, "performed" one of their songs, while lead singer Julie Christmas hacked at a sweet potato with a butcher knife. The low-budget, DIY television show prompted a literary agent to contact Moskowitz, which led to the publication of her debut cookbook, *Vegan With a Vengeance* (2005). Moskowitz's introduction to the cookbook includes an explanation for why the show was called *Post Punk Kitchen*: "I meant it as sort of a self-conscious joke about the people with a punk rock ethos, like me, who are getting older and facing the conundrum of growing up and making compromises that their eighteen-year-old selves might hate them for" (3). The cookbook offers a diverse array of vegan

recipes encompassing brunch, soups, pizzas, sandwiches, cookies, and desserts, among others.

The impetus behind this cookbook and its title, Moskowitz explains, is that "vegans have something to prove. The image of the emaciated vegan living in depravity on a handful of nuts, grass, and brown rice is tiresome" (1). In addition to proving to the world that vegans can eat just as decadently as omnivores, Moskowitz also declares that vegans must prove to each other that they can break their dependence on processed convenience foods like veggie burgers, which requires a decidedly un-punk-rock buy-in to corporate malfeasance. Instead, post-punk vegans should aspire to "spend [their] money on locally grown vegetables and small independent businesses wherever possible" (1), rejecting shady corporations in favor of "only connecting" on a local basis. Here Moskowitz anticipates Pollan's brand of locavorism, but this position also reflects the attitude of punk cuisine, as described by Dylan Clark in "The Raw and the Rotten: Punk Cuisine" (2004):

> Many punks associate the "civilizing" process of producing and transforming food with the human domination of nature and with White, male, corporate supremacy. Punks believe that industrial food fills a person's body with the norms, rationales, and moral pollution of corporate capitalism and imperialism. Punks reject such "poisons" and do not want to be mistaken for being White or part of American mainstream society. A variety of practices, many dietary, provide a powerful critique against the status quo. (19)

So, while Moskowitz no longer cooks for Food Not Bombs, the punk-anarchist, anti-war activist group that serves vegan meals for free to homeless people as a form of protest against nuclear arms, globalization, and various wars, she is enacting her definition of "post punk," which is to advance a set of ethical and political concerns in a way that appeals to vegans and omnivores alike, enabling her to interrogate and critique the status quo of industrial food, albeit within an increasingly mainstream context.

Moskowitz, this time with Romero, followed *Vegan With a Vengeance* with *Vegan Cupcakes Take Over the World* (2006). Employing discourses of revolution and world domination, Moskowitz and Romero present a playfully aggressive version of veganism to a mainstream audience that may have previously relegated veganism to the margins of culinary acceptability.[62] Indeed, Moskowitz certainly views one's food choice as an act of revolution. In a 2005 interview with Gothamist.com, she stated

> Food is everything. It's how language and cultures evolve. Food makes or breaks us. Food is politics and with everything we eat we are making a political decision. […] I think we Americans tend to take what we are fed – the consumerism, the television, the media. We have this attitude of entitlement that is just selfishness and we call it "freedom." We are taught to believe that our dairy cows are living on a happy little farm being milked by a blond maiden who has a crush on the stable boy. We are taught that Columbus discovered America and then sent some Pilgrims

[62] This is not an entirely outlandish point of view: a 2008 survey conducted on behalf of *Vegetarian Times* revealed that 0.5%, or about one million, Americans are vegans; 3.2% (about 7.3 million people) are vegetarians.

> over and the Indians were like "yay!" We are just fed bullshit from day one and then we are forced into adulthood with these false foundations […] ignorance should not be a prerequisite for pleasure. Changing my diet was a nice start in breaking down the bullshit for me. In fact, thinking about what we eat may be the first step in any sort of revolution.

Much like their countercultural forebears the Diggers, whom Belasco describes as staging outrageous "Feeds" in which activists gave out free food sealed in nearly impossible-to-open jars to eaters who had to pass through a large "Frame of Reference" (17) to receive the food, Moskowitz and Romero use the rhetoric of revolution to reframe food for those who would listen.[63] While pledging allegiance to a punk-rock ethos, Moskowitz and Romero use the cupcake — that universal emblem of portable fun and femininity — as an enjoyable entry point for the home cook to "break down the bullshit" of the very real problems of America's food supply. Where the women of Bloodroot put their politics front and center, the work done by *Vegan Cupcakes* and *Veganomicon* relies on a careful integration of politics into the cookbooks in order to make a marginal culinary practice with political and ethical implications more palatable to the average reader.

The Foreword to *Vegan Cupcakes* is written by Sara Quin, one-half of the indie-pop duo Tegan and Sara. In it she claims that her grandmother was a "punk chef," because "at heart she was always breaking the rules and ignoring the instructions of her

[63] The Diggers were a San Francisco-based group of radical activists and improvisational actors who used street theater as a means of raising consciousness in the late 1960s. Informed by the similarly minded 17th century English group of the same name, the Diggers pushed back against capitalism and consumerism by setting up free stores, offering free medical care, transportation, and temporary housing. The feeds described by Belasco were part of the group's greater project of envisioning a society free of money.

own recipes (scrawled on sticky index cards)" (vii). Quin then goes on to claim that she hated cooking until falling in love with her partner; now they serve up the vegan cupcakes found in this cookbook, "pretending that they contribute to [a] healthy lifestyle" (viii). Quin raises an interesting specter in her Foreword, that of the "punk chef." What defines a punk chef? For Quin, to be a punk chef is to break rules and take a mildly anarchist approach to cooking. For Moskowitz, punk "taught me to question everything. Of course, in my case that means questioning how to make a Hostess cupcake without eggs, butter or cream."[64] But why the need to make a Hostess cupcake without eggs or dairy? The tendency of punk cuisine to interrogate mainstream food practices serves two purposes: to protest hegemonic injustices and to opt out of the corporate foodstream. Clark explains:

> For most punks, however, meat-eating is collaborative with an unjust social order, one punks typically define as patriarchy. Given that punks oppose social hierarchies, and given that they locate themselves in staunchly patriarchal societies, they generally find the need to subvert male supremacy in everyday life. Vegetarianism […] helps to differentiate punks from the Mainstream, neatly corresponds to punk egalitarian values, and offers a direct challenge to the gender relations perceived in meat. […] In the daily praxis of punk, vegetarianism and veganism are strategies

[64] Moskin, Julia. "Strict Vegan Ethics, Frosted With Hedonism." *New York Times* 24 January 2007: n. pag. Web. 7 Mar 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/24/dining/24vega.html?_r=1>.

> through which many punks combat corporate capitalism, patriarchy, and environmental collapse. (23-4)

So, by this logic, to develop a vegan simulacrum of the iconic black cupcake with the stark white curlicue of frosting on top is to offer up a version of the mainstream that is stripped of its associations with corporate capitalism and environmental collapse, and is inherently feminist. In other words, Moskowitz remakes the icon from without as a means of pushing back against hegemony.

As Moskowitz's earlier comments to Gothamist and within *Vegan With a Vengeance* illustrate, to question everything as a vegan is to interrogate the ethical and environmental implications of an omnivorous diet. To question everything through the lens of punk is to align oneself with a particularly provocative — and potentially controversial — cultural movement with far-reaching political concerns. Punk rock emerged in Manhattan in the early 1970s as a response to the "pastoral sentimentality, expressionistic excess, and superstar bloat of '60s rock," as well as a rejection of "the political idealism and California flower-power silliness of hippie myth" (Christgau). Bands like the Talking Heads, the Ramones, and Blondie, while eventually stylistically different, are all considered early practitioners of American punk. At the same time, Malcom McLaren, informed by the Situationists in Europe (see Marcus, *Lipstick Traces*), embarked on a social project out of SEX, his London-based clothing store. He formed the Sex Pistols from among the urban youth who worked and loitered at the shop; from there, a movement was born.

Punk rock is a protean, ever-evolving youth culture associated with DIY, anti-consumerism, non-conformity, and left-wing political views as well as with liberal consumption of illicit and mood-altering substances. In her *New York Times* profile of Moskowitz and Romero, Julia Moskin writes, "As punk became more political (and as bands self-destructed) in the 1990s, many punks adopted a more profoundly rebellious stance: against drugs, against alcohol and against the whole habit of mindless consumption." This "profoundly rebellious stance" actually emerged in the early 1980s, borne of the hardcore group Minor Threat, which espoused through its short-lived (1980-1983) career a life free of drugs, tobacco, and alcohol. This movement took its name from the Minor Threat song "Straight Edge," which proclaimed:

I'm a person just like you
But I've got better things to do
Than sit around and fuck my head
Hang out with the living dead
Snort white shit up my nose
Pass out at the shows
I don't even think about speed
That's something I just don't need
I've got the straight edge

Straightedge ("sXe") punks began identifying themselves and each other with a large black "X" emblazoned on the backs of their hands. As sXe evolved, some adherents extended this ethos to include eschewing promiscuity, caffeine, prescription drugs, and

following a vegetarian or vegan diet, although sometimes the dietary restrictions were rooted in an anti-establishment urge: "Many punks became vegetarian to protest corporate and government control of the food supply. Veganism takes vegetarianism farther into cruelty-free territory by avoiding anything produced by animals: milk, cheese, eggs, honey, etc." (Moskin). The association of sXe with veganism emerged in the 1990s as some punk bands, such as Earth Crisis and Vegan Reich, exhibited a militant animal rights agenda alongside the already established "clean living" sXe standards. In his ethnographic study of sXe culture, Ross Haenfler deftly articulates the connection between sXe youth and social/environmental justice causes:

> In an individualistic culture, many people live out their values as individuals connected by a collective identity. Individuals bonded by a collective identity experience a *community of meaning* that makes the personal political and gives new, politicized meaning to everyday actions. It creates an oppositional consciousness and a framework for understanding social problems that leads to a politicization of everyday life. Adherents committed to the collective identity live out a set of core values and/or behaviors, but then they are able to fit the collective identity to their individual preferences. They tailor the identity to match their interests, biographical availability, and values. (76)

Put another way, not every sXe punk is a vegan, but the practice of veganism as a reflection of environmental and animal-rights concerns fits in nicely with the sXe ethos.

The traces of punk-rock's rebellious ethos and sXe's politicized asceticism linger in *Vegan Cupcakes* in that Moskowitz and Romero deploy a rhetoric of revolution, subversion, and pleasure as a means of communicating the appeal of vegan cupcakes (and, by extension, other vegan foods, as seen in *Veganomicon*). The cookbook's introduction begins with the line, "Who would think that something as simple and unassuming as a cupcake would bring about the revolution?" (1) The revolution in question is, apparently, making veganism palatable to omnivores, although the dimensions of said revolution are somewhat vague. Cupcakes, however, serve as the ultimate Trojan horse in this revolution: "They can be snuck into the office, birthday parties, bat mitzvahs, the Super Bowl, what have you. Innocent and adorable, no one will suspect that these toothsome morsels are cruelty-free" (1). According to Moskowitz and Romero, cupcakes provide a pleasant — and pleasurable — entrypoint into the world of veganism. And if omnivores find vegan cupcakes delicious, who is to say that they won't find other vegan foods equally tasty? The revolution, then, is to veganize the world, one pleasurable, portable morsel at a time.

Moskowitz and Romero pepper their revolutionary project with political commentary, sometimes subtle, sometimes overt. For example, in the "Cupcakes A to Z" feature in *Vegan Cupcakes*, they ask, "Who doesn't think cupcakes are cute? Off the top of our heads, probably only Dick Cheney" (3). By taking a swipe at Cheney, who served as Vice President under George W. Bush from 2001-2009 and earned extremely low approval ratings for a variety of actions from his involvement in controversial international situations to accidentally shooting an elderly Texas attorney in the face

while on a hunting trip, the authors establish themselves as politically left and no great fans of war-mongering political conservatives. Other politically charged interjections take on a more environmental tone; later in the book, the recipe for Peanut Butter Cupcakes explains, "We also call these Jimmy Carter Cakes, because he was a peanut farmer and he loves solar energy. But no one cares about that. What they do care about is that these cupcakes are pushed to maximum peanuty capacity and still remain moist and fluffy. And that is almost as important as solar energy" (59). Elsewhere, an appeal to "use organic canola oil to ensure that it is free of GMOs," bears a footnote explaining, "GMOs are Genetically Modified Organisms, and unfortunately a large percentage of rapeseed fields, which is the plant that canola oil comes from, have fallen victim to genetic modification. We don't like it. We'll take our oils sans science fiction movie corporate control, thank you very much" (10). Here we see a move from a mildly humorous, playful swipe at a widely hated political figure to more serious and straightforward editorializing about matters of great importance to those concerned with environmental issues and who are also distrustful of corporations.

The urgency of the proscription against GM canola is particularly evocative in its vitriol toward corporate interference in agriculture. Moskowitz and Romero's footnote about "science fiction movie corporate control" over the food supply voices the concerns of many food-centered activist groups and seems to take direct aim at the Monsanto Company, a multinational agricultural biotechnology corporation that sells more than 90% of the United States' genetically engineered seeds; in 2007, Monsanto's GM seeds were planted on 246 million acres around the world. Monsanto's other major products

include Agent Orange, aspartame, bovine growth hormone, and DDT. To take aim at a multinational biotechnology company with a history of suing farmers for patent violations caused by cross-pollination of canola fields within the pages of a vegan cupcake cookbook is to situate said cookbook within a decidedly unambiguous political space, one that might easily be aligned with punk's anticonsumerist ethos.

Readers can trace this anti-Big Food thread throughout Moskowitz and Romero's cookbooks. In the foreword to *Vegan with a Vengeance*, Ryan MacMichael of vegblog.org states,

> [Moskowitz's] avoidance of prepared convenience foods will help wean you from the corporate teat while at the same time saving you money and encouraging you to support local growers. […] Eating is a moral act or a political statement, depending on whom you ask. When you choose to stop eating animal products and supporting big business, you prove both statements to be correct. (xiii-xiv)

Moskowitz's dedication to a vegan cuisine that relies on scratch cooking rather than on manufactured "chreeze"[65] and premade vegan meatballs with Italian seasonings manifests itself throughout the pages of *Veganomicon*. The introduction to the section titled "Mix and Match" tells a humorous story about the evolution of the vegan plate, beginning with "Cro-Veganon man (and woman)" relying heavily on side dishes like potatoes and frozen vegetables and moving on to the dubious advent of faux meats: "Suddenly the great plains of the supermarket and grocery store were flooded with herds of veggies [sic]

[65] A dairy- and soy-free cheese substitute made from nutritional yeast.

burgers, tofu dogs, dairy-free cheeses and soy kielbasa. And all was good. Well, sort of. While we are happy that all of this stuff exists these days, we found ourselves really wanting just good, home-cooked food that didn't start its life in a factory or mystery vat of chemicals" (104). The philosophy here is clear: to rely on processed, mass-produced meat substitutes like veggie burgers and Tofu Pups for sustenance is just as unacceptable as it is to cobble together a meal out of side dishes. While some could read an argument against processed foods as ecofeminist in its philosophy, it is in this context simply a more mature manifestation of punk's emphasis on DIY and questioning hegemony.

Particularly telling in this regard is Moskowitz and Romero's alignment of vegan cupcakes (and vegan cooking in general) with Transcendentalism. Using a play on a quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson's "The American Scholar" — "We will bake with our own hands; we will frost with our own icing; we will speak with our own mouths full" (4) — the authors align themselves with his edict to think for oneself and to break free from inherited societal norms. For Moskowitz and Romero, the vegan cupcake baker is "woman thinking," always daring to question the traditional approach to baking, which is historically reliant on dairy and eggs. To create one's own culinary world via reevaluating and reconfiguring what a cupcake recipe looks like without sacrificing the appeal of the end result reinforces Moskowitz's identification with punk while at the same time speaks to the DIY nature of the vegan cook. Too, the vegan reinterpretation of the Hostess cupcake communicates what it means to operate within the dominant culture, yet breaking free from the expected routes to the same end. It says, "Here is what *I* see when I think of a Hostess cupcake." Ryan MacMichael states that to be vegan (and, to

some extent, vegetarian) necessitates creativity and a DIY approach because "we don't live in a very vegan world" (xiii). Time and again, via the dissemination of tips for the do-it-yourself vegan baker,[66] Moskowitz and Romero privilege the act of making one's own world — and cupcakes — via seeking out and creating alternatives to the accepted ways of doing things.

Where *Vegan Cupcakes* seeks to revolutionize the way mainstream eaters look at vegan treats, *Veganomicon* (2007) builds upon that foundation by seeking to present unique and creative vegan dishes that are more than just "veganized" versions of familiar foods, but also to represent vegans and veganism to the mainstream audience Moskowitz and Romero attracted when they took over the world via vegan cupcakes. They do this in a number of ways: via a playfully pedagogic tone, defining what it means to be vegan, the culinary tools and practices they should adopt, and a sustained critique of and distancing from processed foods.

Much of the playful tone of *Veganomicon* is in the interest of poking fun at the mainstream perception of vegans as self-righteous, unshaven, emaciated zealots who eat nothing but twigs and salads. Indeed, the introduction to the "Salads and Dressings" section of the cookbook addresses this very issue:

> [A]ll too often, salads are assumed to be the staple of vegetarians everywhere, and lots of times they end up being just that. It's because we sympathize with the eleven-year-old vegetarian who ends up eating a sprig

[66] For example, suggesting zippered plastic bags with a hole cut in the corner as a "super punk-rock" alternative to pastry bags for piping frosting onto cupcakes (18).

> of parsley and a slice of limp, pink tomato while the rest of her family chows down on hamburgers that we've often paid attention to heartier, cooked fare, rather than a handful of leaves and olive oil. (80)

While Moskowitz made the decision to minimize the presence of salads in her inaugural cookbook because of this unfortunate association of vegetarianism/veganism and salads, *Veganomicon* acknowledges that there is a place for creative and inventive salads in everyone's diet, while accommodating the vegan's need to have a salad with some nutritional heft in the form of "tender grains, beans, roasted vegetables, and mushrooms" (80). Evoking the wryly bathetic image of a pre-teen eating a sad dinner of lonely parsley and mealy tomato elicits empathy and perhaps identification within the reader while keeping the cookbook's irreverent tone intact.

Identification is key when poking fun of the perception of vegans within *Veganomicon*, such as in the recipe for Snobby Joes, a rendition of the childhood classic made with lentils rather than meat. When Moskowitz and Romero write "Snobby Joe thinks he's better than all the other Joes because he doesn't have any meat" (98), they take direct aim at the stereotype of vegans as arrogant blowhards who cannot resist feeling superior to omnivores, which might inspire a chuckle from the vegan who combats that perception daily. At the same time, the playful tone invites the non-vegan reader to see vegetables and grains in a different way, as worthy of taking center stage on the plate, rather than relegated to supporting roles. In Moskowitz and Romero's hands, broccoli makes polenta "like, 'RAR!'" (114), quinoa has the magical potential to rapidly elevate one to "level 7 vegan" (115), and chickpeas take on a personality so saucy that

they "need at least a PG-13 rating" (123). Within the pages of *Veganomicon*, vegetables and grains are rendered attractive, brimming with personality, and most importantly, delicious in their own right. By extension, the vegan personality brims with moxie and irreverence without overtly forcing an ethical agenda on the non-vegan reader, who will, ideally, someday join the vegan fold, presumably having bought in to the political and ethical arguments for the practice.

However, the non-vegan reader will also come away from *Veganomicon* with a clear sense of what it means to be a vegan, both within and outside of the kitchen. For example, the recipe for Beanball Subs asserts that "These would be perfect for a Super Bowl party, or since you are a vegan and hate football, a Nobel Prize party. Ooh, we can't wait to see who wins for physics this year!" (99). Home cooks are reminded that Chile Cornmeal Crusted Tofu might accompany a "nice vegan night in," which includes writing donation checks to Farm Sanctuary, a farm animal protection organization that rescues cows, pigs, turkeys, and the like from industrialized farms and aims to "educate the public about the centrality of the vegan diet to compassionate living,"[67] and reading *Herbivore* magazine, a vegan-centric publication in Portland, Oregon, that ceased production in 2007 (125). In addition to the ethical concerns, part of being a vegan entails engaging in a sustained public relations campaign on behalf of veganism, or practicing guerrilla evangelism in the interest of recruiting omnivores into the fold. An early section of *Veganomicon*, dedicated to low-fat cooking, contains a sidebar titled "When NOT to

[67] "About Us: Position Statements." *FarmSanctuary.org*. Farm Sanctuary, Inc., n.d. Web. 7 Mar 2011. <http://www.farmsanctuary.org/about/position/>.

Cook Low-Fat!" Among the four situations in which vegan evangelists should avoid diet-friendly dishes is "First-Time Vegan Food-Tasters," with the explanation that

> They may not know it yet, but your flesh-eating dinner guests are going to go vegan. *Someday*. And part of your devious plan is to render them speechless with a most outrageous richly sauced seitan piccata, creamy garlic mashed potatoes, and "buttery" cookies slathered with homemade chocolate-hazelnut spread. This is where you want to pull out all the stops and smother them with tender, loving fat. Don't let their first memory of vegan eating be steamed kale and fat-free bean balls. (23)

Later, Moskowitz and Romero insist in the introduction to "Breads, Muffins, and Scones" that skill in baking is essential to being a good vegan cook because "no matter how much you may try to get people excited about tempeh burgers, a loaf of warm banana bread will always get their attention" (217). This logic is reminiscent of the agenda informing *Vegan Cupcakes*: the way to the non-vegan's heart is through fat-drenched foods and decadently sweet pastries. Delicious vegan meals and baked goods are the gateway foods to a world of vegan culinary adventurousness.

Much of Moskowitz and Romero's evangelical agenda is dependent upon their media and popular-culture savvy. Unlike the women of Bloodroot, Moskowitz and Romero (and, by extension, the online vegan community they have assembled via theppk.com) engage directly with cultural products such as the Food Network and the food-blogging trend, as well as exhibiting the willingness to listen and respond to their readers, both online and in print. Indeed, the Food Network in particular plays a huge role

in Moskowitz and Romero's vegan empire. In her introduction to *Vegan With a Vengeance*, Moskowitz attributes the origin of the cooking show to a post-9/11 depression in which she spent her free time away from her jobs (a "cubicle job" and cooking at a vegan café) watching Food Network and wondering why there were no vegan cooking shows. "It was while watching Emeril butcher yet another innocent chicken that I thought, 'Someone should really do a vegan cooking show.' And then I realized, 'I'm someone! I can do it!' If punk rock taught me anything, it's that we can create our own forms of entertainment. We don't have to sit back idly and wait for something to happen – we can make it happen," she writes (3). The result of transcending the passivity of watching television, of course, is not only the (now-defunct) television show, but also a line of vegan cookbooks,[68] and a certain degree of celebrity-chef status among vegan, vegetarian, and vegan-curious culinarians. It is fitting, then, that Moskowitz and Romero would pay homage to the cultural institution that inspired their success. The introduction to the recipe for Creole Stuffed Peppers includes a confession that "We don't know that much about Southern cooking besides what we've gleaned from too many hours of watching the Food Network, but we used the basic herbs and spices from Creole cooking […] so we think these earn the right to be called Creole" (*Veganomicon* 60-61). What Moskowitz and Romero, natives of New York and Connecticut, respectively, lack in knowledge of certain foodways, the Food Network can address. Later in *Veganomicon*, the authors imagine Smlove Pie as a dessert that Paula

[68] *Vegan With A Vengeance* (2005), *Vegan Cupcakes Take Over the World* (2006), *Veganomicon* (2007), *Vegan Brunch* (Moskowitz 2009), *Vegan Cupcakes Invade Your Cookie Jar* (2009), *Viva Vegan*! (Romero 2010), and *Appetite for Reduction* (Moskowitz forthcoming December 2010).

Deen[69] would make (257), and describe Chickpea Noodle Soup as "*Chickpea Soup for the Vegan Soul*. This is some Oprah's Book Club stuff right here: a great soup for when you're feeling under the weather and need something tasty to slurp on while you watch TV and pity yourself" (139). The argument here is that vegan food can be comforting and just as everyday and mundane as self-help books and daytime television, an equivalence that makes vegan food more readily identifiable to the mainstream eater.

Moskowitz and Romero also demonstrate an awareness of, if not a direct engagement with, the world of food blogs. In *Vegan Cupcakes*, the authors claim as part of their "Cupcakes from A to Z" enumeration that cupcakes are "Blogworthy. A surefire way to get people to look at your blog is by posting pictures of cupcakes" (3). *Veganomicon*'s Chickpea Cutlets are guaranteed to "take over food blogs worldwide" (133), and a hunt for chervil for Porcini-Wild Rice Soup will "make a great blog entry" (140). This embrace of food blogs speaks to the "unauthorized" nature of recipes and the way in which they invite revision and replication (McDougall 117). Many food bloggers are not blogging their own proprietary recipes; rather, they are reproducing or very slightly adapting previously published recipes found either in print or via other online sources. Most are careful to attribute their sources, but the nature of recipes is such that proper attribution is often difficult and even unnecessary. While the recipes in Moskowitz and Romero's cookbooks are protected under copyright, they acknowledge and indeed encourage food bloggers to document their experiences with the recipes. While some

[69] A chef-personality made famous by her love of butter, as exhibited on her Food Network cooking shows.

bloggers might opt out of re-publishing the recipes from *Veganomicon* on their blogs,[70] if Moskowitz and Romero are to achieve the objective of converting every eater on the planet to veganism, it is in their best interest to encourage reproduction of their recipes on food blogs. Such a position can only help to expand and deepen the community of vegans and future vegans Moskowitz and Romero have cultivated through theppk.com and beyond.

Veganomicon bears traces of this online community within its pages. Moskowitz and Romero respond directly to reader concerns about the previously published recipe for Simple Seitan:

> This is the *Vegan With a Vengeance* seitan recipe simplified. After publishing that book we got a lot of questions, often asking if one could substitute this, leave out that – sometimes just asking how we got to be so beautiful. While we won't reveal our beauty secrets, we will present you with this bare-bones boiled seitan recipe with clearer directions, simpler ingredients, and just the right amount of seitan for most recipes in this book. (131)

The variations between the recipes are subtle: the *Veganomicon* seitan recipe calls for fewer ingredients (minus flour, tomato paste, and lemon zest), as well as yields a smaller portion (about 50% less seitan). Additionally, the forums on theppk.com have a thread dedicated to discussion of typographical errors found in *Veganomicon*, as well as reader

[70] For example, the author of "An Omnivore Cooks the *Veganomicon,*" http://omni-vegan.blogspot.com/, refuses to post copyrighted recipes.

feedback and recipe reviews as they cook from *Veganomicon* and Moskowitz and Romero's other cookbooks at home. If a Post Punk Kitchen user has a question about a recipe from *Vegan Cupcakes* or *Veganomicon* (or virtually any other vegan cookbook on the planet), they can post it on theppk.com forums and get an answer. There is even a "food porn" thread that allows readers to post photographs of the dishes they compile at home, both from Moskowitz and Romero's books and other vegan recipes. Because the goal of the food porn thread is to "promote delicious looking AND tasting vegan food," the main rule about posting food porn photographs is that "if it looks ok on your plate, but looks like puke in the pic, don't post it."

Integration into the mainstream, for the Post Punk Kitchen, means presenting an appealing version of veganism in the interest of easing the practice out of the margins and into more kitchens. The benefits, the Post Punk Kitchen's body of works seems to argue, are better food, more local connections with farmers and other vegans, and to declare independence from Big Food. The Post Punk Kitchen has many of the same goals as Bloodroot, but the communities being represented possess markedly different ethoi. While they undertake countercultural projects, interrogating mainstream hegemony via their oppositional identities, both reveal blind spots that serve to reinforce hegemony rather than to puncture it. For if both projects serve as prime examples of Belasco's "edible dynamic," wherein food represents the intersection of the personal and the political, the appropriation of ethnic and third-world peoples' foodways represents a turn back toward, rather than a breaking free from, the structures Bloodroot and PPK claim to disavow.

The Limitations of Countercuisine Communities

Both Bloodroot and Post Punk Kitchen represent culinary projects rooted in the countercuisine, representing their "coherent set[s] of alternative food beliefs and practices" through their cookbooks. However, a close examination of the gaps in their representations underscore a tension between the personal and the political, the local and the global.

In *The Best of Bloodroot Volume Two*, the authors argue that veganism offers the potential of an expanded worldview, one that enables the feminist eater to empathize with poorer women across the world. Miriam and Furie catalog the vegetables and grains available to the vegan palate, arguing that, "Until we forgo the meats, we don't have time or stomach space to discover, to learn, to celebrate these riches of the earth. This is not deprivation, rather it is a door of 'limitation' that opens to a new culinary landscape" (*Two* x). This is the rationale behind the restaurant's emphasis on ethnic cuisines, which they argue is what makes their food feminist. The authors celebrate the influx of immigrants representing everywhere from Brazil to Pakistan into the Bridgeport area, stating that the variety of nationalities and ethnicities serves as a "culinary horn of plenty" for them: "It is where our inspiration comes from" (*Two* xiii). The image of a "culinary horn of plenty" within this context is problematic, given its close association with European settlers, Manifest Destiny, and the eventual decimation of America's Native peoples. The cornucopia is a symbol of abundance, particularly of grain, fruit, and

other foodstuffs and serves as an emblem of imperialist expansion;[71] by this logic, the ethnic diversity of Bridgeport symbolizes a harvest waiting to be reaped by white women, who then turn this inspiration into a product that is meant both to express solidarity with third-world women but also to be exchanged for money.

Serving up a plate of chickpea dal as a feminist representation of and expression of solidarity with impoverished third-world women who may not have access to enough food or clean water is, at best, disingenuous if not outright exploitative. Furthermore, a gesture such as this dwells purely in the imaginary; the exchange of a plate of food for money does nothing to improve the plight of the abstract suffering brown women invoked in the restaurant's mandate, nor does the feminist have to sacrifice anything other than a few dollars. While Bloodroot imagines itself as a feminist utopia resisting the hegemonic demands of the patriarchy via its production of feminist food and cultivation of a vibrant feminist community, for all of their posturing they cannot see the gap in their ideology that undermines their entire project. Bloodroot's lack of critical reflection on how their representation of third-world women serves to re-enact many of the criticisms of Western feminism voiced by black, postcolonial, and Third World feminist theorists and activists.[72]

The Post Punk Kitchen bears a similar paradox in its ideologies. I have already discussed the ways in which part of the work of *Veganomicon* is to represent veganism to

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[71] See Warren Belasco's discussion of cornucopian ideology in *Meals to Come: A History of the Future of Food*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006. Print.

[72] See Narayan, Uma. *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third-World Feminism*. New York: Routledge, 1997. Print

a suspicious populace. When the vegan home chef decides to put together a meal that will impress and please her guests, "[i]t can be even more daunting for the vegan host, because we folks have the additional task of representing veganism" (266). One of the final sections of *Veganomicon*, "Menus for the Masses," groups recipes from throughout the book according to themes in order to help allay the vegan host's dinner-party anxiety. Among the fifteen themes are "My Own Private India," featuring Tamarind Lentils, Basmati Rice, Curried Tofu, and Cornmeal Masala Brussels Sprouts; "Down-Home Gourmet," with Cheater Baked Beans, Smoky Grilled Tempeh, Sauteed Collards, and Fudgy Wudgy Blueberry Brownies with Vanilla Ice Cream; and Mexican, Not Mexican't, featuring Black Beans with Chipotle Adobo Sauce, Guacamole, Mexican Millet, Jicama-Watercress-Avocado Salad with Spicy Citrus Dressing, and Banana-Chocolate Chip Bread Pudding.

However, what these menu suggestions reveal in their representations of veganism is a profound blind spot for *Veganomicon*, the treatment of ethnicity. The groupings themselves speak to a certain essentialist conception of the ethnic cuisines represented here: Brussels sprouts are quite rare (and very expensive) in India and grilled or baked tofu marinated in a "curry" marinade (comprising rice vinegar, olive oil, soy sauce, and curry powder) hardly approximates Indian cuisine (although the designation "My Own Private India" implies that the dishes included are inspired by India rather than making any claim to authenticity). The presence of collards on the "Down Home" menu evokes soul food, but baked beans (described in the recipe on page 122 as perfect for entertaining guests from Boston) seem counterintuitive, and a bacon-simulating tempeh

adds an uncomfortable essentializing dimension to the menu. Finally, and most egregiously, the idiom "Mexican't" is at the very least racially insensitive, and downright venomous when deployed in certain contexts, while including black beans and guacamole to a "Mexican" menu is lazy and essentialist. This fast and loose treatment of ethnic foods permeates *Veganomicon*, from the authors' explanation that they originally wanted to call Everyday Chipotle-Vegetable Tamales "'fiesta-something' tamales, but then were worried that people might wait until the Cinco de Mayo or some distant holiday before giving these morsels a shot" (59), to the misspelling of *aguacate* in the recipe for Guacamole (69).[73]

The authors are equally blind when it comes to matters of class, especially as it pertains to the cost of tools and materials and access to leisure time. While many of the ingredients in *Veganomicon* are fairly accessible (indeed, the authors utilize the symbol of a shopping cart to indicate ingredients that are easily found at a typical supermarket), the emphasis on quality cooking tools such as chef's knives and food processors privileges the home cook with the means to purchase them at high-end cooking stores. If a reader does not have the funds to purchase something as essential as a food processor, the authors joke, she should "get married simply so you can put [one] on your wedding registry" (13). Moskowitz and Romero's "more is more" philosophy (15) extends even to unitaskers like crepe pans and citrus reamers.

The aspiring vegan home chef should also "invest in the best-quality flours, oils, chocolate, and spices you can buy. Of key importance is to get your hands on high-

[73] The word is mistakenly spelled "aquacate" in the cookbook.

budget, real vanilla extract" (232). A survey of premium vanilla extracts for sale via the Internet revealed prices ranging from $9–$45 for a four-ounce bottle. Anyone hoping to make chocolate chip cookies using vegan chocolate can expect to pay more than $6 for a nine-ounce bag of Sunspire chocolate chips; the Whole Foods store brand offers a $1 price cut. Many recipes in both *Veganomicon* and *Vegan Cupcakes* call for nonhydrogenated vegan shortening (many shortening products use animal fats or dairy proteins such as whey and casein; eaters who wish to avoid trans fats may want to seek out nonhydrogenated oils and fats for cooking and baking), which is not terribly expensive if one knows where to look (organic canola or coconut oils will suffice, although coconut oil will affect the taste of the final product). However, the most popular, easy-to-find options for this ingredient are Spectrum and Earth Balance shortenings, which are both expensive and bear their own ethical burdens.[74] A 24-ounce tub of Spectrum shortening costs approximately $13, where a 48-ounce tub of Crisco costs approximately $11. A 45-ounce tub of Earth Balance shortening costs about $17, and a pack of four shortening sticks costs about $6. While many proponents of veganism argue that the dietary practice is generally very inexpensive, *Vegan Cupcakes* and certain recipes in *Veganomicon* certainly serve as the exception.

[74] These products are made from palm oil, the production of which has devastating environmental impacts. The spread of palm oil plantations has been linked to excessive greenhouse gas emissions; deforestation in Malaysia, Central America, and parts of Africa; crippling habitat destruction of the Sumatran tiger, Sumatran Orangutans, and the Asian rhinoceros; and the degradation of biodiversity hot spots. Can any product so closely connected to these offenses against the environment and endangered animals be truly vegan?

In addition to the authors' seemingly willful blindness to the issue of access to expensive tools and ingredients, there is a tacit acknowledgement within Moskowitz and Romero's cookbooks that the reader/vegan home chef also has access to leisure time, which affords her the ability to host dinner parties and brunches and construct delicate baked stratas and sip Bloody Marys. Extolling the pleasures of brunch, the authors write, "Eating a filling meal for brunch frees up your day from planning dinner so you can do fun stuff instead, like thrift store shopping, playing with the cats, or going back to bed. Just put off the dishes until Monday morning" (71). For Moskowitz and Romero, the long, leisurely weekends dedicated to brunching and shopping exist in a world in which there are no children to attend to, no church or community obligations, and no retail jobs that stake equal claim to weekend days as to weekdays. Coupled with the emphasis on the procurement and use of the highest-quality tools and ingredients the home chef can afford, this celebration of a dining ritual closely associated with leisured privilege suggests a significant distancing on the part of the authors from their anti-consumerist punk-rock roots.

These blind spots — the insensitive and uncritical representations of ethnicity and the blithe class bias as regards access to materials and leisure time — signal the hegemonic turn of these two projects. How can a countercultural community fully interrogate what they believe to be the oppressive structures of patriarchy and capitalism when they fail to account fully, or even appropriately, for the populations that are the most oppressed by those same structures? How is it possible to write against hegemonic power while tacitly participating in it? Some may argue that such projects undertake a

form of disidentification a la Muñoz, in which outsiders interrogate mainstream culture by working from within it, repurposing the text(s) in question to serve their own narrative ends. While there is value in expressing resistance to patriarchy via vegan cupcakes and plates of vegetarian comfort food, the unconscious way in which the appropriations take place within the Bloodroot and PPK cookbooks, the project of connections between and among communities leaves the appetite for change somewhat unsatiated.

Perhaps a more potent, multidimensional version of the edible dynamic lies in the ways in which women of diaspora — some of the very women with whom Bloodroot claims feminist solidarity — narrate their positions as liminal figures. One of the ways in which women of the Indian diaspora enact this narration is how they mediate their relationships to Big Food. For the migrant mother, processed convenience food represents a disruption of her connection to home. The recipes that migrated with her from India represent a preservation of her home culture and traditions, which by extension renders them the lodestar of her identity. For her children, those same contested convenience foods represent much-wanted assimilation, but to turn away from them also signals a way in which they can fashion their own first-generation identities. Both generations feel a drive to connect in some way or another to their identities and with one another; the challenge is located in holding the local and the global in tension with one another.

CHAPTER 3

My Own Private India: Recipes for Diasporic Identities

Her life is cooked and digested,
nothing but leftovers in Tupperware.
Look, she says, once I was roast duck
on your platter with parsley but now I am Spam.
Burning dinner is not incompetence but war. — Marge Piercy, "What's that smell in the kitchen?"

The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act in the United States saw a huge shift in immigration to America from Asia, including many male engineering and medical students from India, now known as the "brain drain" generation. For the women affected by the brain drain (i.e., wives of the male émigrés), immigration presents a different set of problems from which their husbands likely do not suffer: isolation and loneliness, homesickness, culture shock, all while continuing to maintain their cultural identity and achieve some semblance of normal life, which often centered on the production of food. Back in the '60s, '70s, and '80s, it was difficult for Indian women to find the foodstuffs of home within the context of the American grocery store, and so they were left to improvise. This improvisation — the re-assembly of a recipe from home while lacking the proper ingredients — is a significant and vital aspect of the migrant Indian woman's life. It is a practice rich with meaning, one ripe for exploration through the lens of the recipe, which becomes the artifact that tells the story of their lives, how the migrant mothers negotiate the cleaving from home via migration, and how their first-generation children attempt to differentiate themselves from their mothers, a chain of processes

represented in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003), Monica Pradhan's *The Hindi-Bindi Club* (2007), and Amulya Malladi's *Serving Crazy with Curry* (2004).

The women portrayed in these texts undertake myriad and complex negotiations in the process of shaping their diasporic selves, holding in tension the lives and mores they knew in their home countries alongside the cultural and political histories of their host countries. Those hailing from India must negotiate the vestigial effects of Independence and Partition, particularly those who lived through it: religious tensions between Hindus and Muslims including communitarian riots, political unrest including the assassinations of Mahatma Gandhi and Indira Gandhi, the four Indo-Pak wars (spanning from 1947 to 1999) and the ongoing political tensions between India and Pakistan. Indian women, and I am speaking here of the older generation of women represented in these texts, must live up to the expectations set forth for them according to their cultural and religious frameworks: according to the Hindu Laws of Manu, they must be virtuous, submissive, and unquestioning in the face of patriarchy, especially their husbands,[75] many of whom initiated migration to Great Britain and the United States.

In *Building Houses Out of Chicken Legs*, Psyche Williams-Forson provides a provocative and enormously useful critical model for talking about the cultural work done by representations of food and women. In it, she "considers that interdisciplinary trail of evidence – the vast array of 'bones' in order to add to the spaces wherein black people's, and in particular black women's, agency emerges. […] The language that

[75] The Laws of Manu, which dictate that women must be kept in dependence to and protected by males. See Wessinger, Catherine. "Laws of Manu." *Catherine Wessinger: Professor of Religious Studies, Loyola University New Orleans*. Loyno.edu, n.d. Web. 7 Mar 2011. <http://www.loyno.edu/~wessing/docs/Manu.html>.

describes food relations makes literature a fruitful site in which to find black women's acts of self-definition" (2). Williams-Forson's methodology is useful here because within this context, the trope of the recipe helps to tell a story about the diasporic Indian woman's experience and to facilitate her acts of self-definition, which includes negotiating a relationship with packaged, processed foods. Where processed foods are static, unchanging, and are portable and compressed (like Spam), the assembly — or re-assembly or dis-assembly — of a recipe particularizes the output, and each instance of assembly reveals something salient and perhaps previously secret about gender, cultural, national, economic, social, or familial identities. In other words, the women in these texts use the recipe to articulate their feelings and concerns and to make connections within themselves and others. By eschewing the homogeneity of Big Food in favor of creating their own recipes to create food to feed themselves, their families, and their communities, these women bring themselves into relief from within a process that previously functioned to conceal them.

A few scholars have centered their studies of cookbooks and national identity on specific nations. For example, Nicola Humble's excellent and provocative *Culinary Pleasures* is a cultural history of the British cookbook. In it she argues, "Cook books are not simply clear windows into the kitchens of the past. Rather, they are interventions in the diet of the nation, attempts to popularize new foods, new methods, fresh attitudes" (4). For example, Mrs. Beeton documented in her foundational *Household Management* a newly urbanized middle class marked by clearer distinctions of the gendered spheres of private/domestic/female and public/economic/male, and attempted to cater to their

fantasies and tastes, while also drafting recipes, such as one for almond cheesecakes, that reflected their aspirations without being too extravagant.

Very few studies concern themselves specifically with India and Indian food. Humble touches briefly on the movement of Indian food into British cookbooks via sahibs nostalgic for the foodways of their sojourns in India. Lizzy Collingham, with *Curry: A Tale of Cooks & Conquerors* (2006), explores the Imperial legacy in terms of food studies. Collingham's study is an historical survey, from the medieval-era occupation of the Moghuls to the contemporary manifestations of Indian-style "curries" across the globe, of the ways in which Indian food migrated from the Subcontinent into British consciousness. Collingham's study includes recipes, whose placement speaks to certain aspects of my project. The recipes placed at the end of chapters are meant for readers to try out in their own kitchens, while the recipes within chapters are provided for historical context. Read together, Humble and Collingham's studies provide useful historical contexts for my understanding of Indian foodways and colonialism.

Moving from the historical to the cultural, Arjun Appadurai's "How to Make a National Cuisine" (1988) focuses on the explosion of cookbooks written in India aimed at an Anglophone audience. Appadurai states that what has emerged as an Indian national cuisine via these cookbooks has been shaped by an emerging, largely urban, middle class that ignores or seeks to overthrow previous sociocultural boundaries such as caste, region, and so on, and that comprises "civil servants, teachers, doctors, lawyers, clerks, and businessmen, as well as film stars, scientists, and military personnel" (5-6). Appadurai portrays this standardized Indian national cuisine as pastiche informed by the

"polyglot culture" of this diverse new economic segment of Indian society. Appadurai argues that cookbooks serve as a particularly female form of expression of the emergent new middle class in India: "Cookbooks allow women from one group to explore the tastes of another, just as cookbooks allow women from one group to be represented to another" (6). The complex interchanges of culinary practices and styles within this increasingly cosmopolitan context, Appadurai argues, creates "culinary stereotypes of the Other […] that are then partly standardized in the new cookbooks" (7). While Appadurai does not take a stand on this standardization of "Other" cuisine, he does argue that this national cuisine represents an "arbitrary hodgepodge" (20), a flattening of regional, ethnic, religious, and medicinal variations in the spectrum of culinary styles and practices in India and concludes that, ultimately, we should keep an eye on cookbooks as "artifacts of culture in the making" (24).

Seven years later, Uma Narayan points out in *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third-World Feminism* (1997) that curry powder is a fabrication of English colonists, and connects this act with the English "fabrication" of India itself (164), a sort of eating the Other on a grand scale. She writes,

> So, when the British incorporated curry into British cuisine […] they were incorporating the Other into the self, but on the self's terms. They were incorporating not Indian food, but their own "invention" of curry powder, a pattern not too different from the way in which India itself was ingested into Empire – for India as a modern political entity was "fabricated" through the intervention of British rule, which replaced the masala of the

> Moghul empire and various kingdoms and princely states with the unitary signifier "India," much as British curry powder replaced local masalas. (165)

With the above consideration in mind, when a mother instructs her daughter via a written recipe in *The Hindi-Bindi Club* to never use curry powder, it is more than just an aesthetically inspired imperative. It is a resistance to the colonial forces that shaped Indian identity for generations, and also suggests a resistance to the compression of food and a culture into mass-produced units for sale.

Narayan goes on to argue that Western eaters of "ethnic foods" should not necessarily concern themselves with the cultural contexts from which these foods emerged, that to do so would only serve to enhance the eater's culinary imperialism and "further contribute to westerners' prestige and sophistication because their eating was enhanced by a few sprinkles of spicy information about the 'cultural context' of the ethnic food eaten" (181). She sees the value in "eating the Others" because it provides Western eaters with the opportunity to concern themselves with the "complexities involved in the production and consumption of the 'ethnic food' they eat" and that awareness of the "material and political realities of food production and consumption would help counter the passive and unthinking eating of 'ethnic foods' that partly constitutes 'food colonialism'" (182). Narayan and Collingham complement each other in this regard, in that they provide useful perspectives into the historical and cultural significance of curry powder. These two sources underscore how very significant it is for an Indian mother to explicitly forbid its use; more than simply a personal preference, this

proscription is wrapped up in the complex history of the imperialist practice of incorporating and co-opting subjugated cultures.

The most important intervention into the discourse of foodways, nationalism, and Indian diaspora, however, comes from Anita Mannur. In *Culinary Fictions: Food in South Asian Diasporic Culture* (2009), Mannur focuses on the recent trend of food narratives within the context of South Asian diasporic cultural production. She writes, "discursively, the terms by which 'Indianness' is imagined almost always mobilizes a culinary idiom; more often than not food is situated in narratives about racial and ethnic identity as an intractable measure of cultural authenticity" (3). One aspect of Mannur's project is to uncover and disclose the complex contours beneath this flattening. She does so by interrogating the whys and hows of the deployment of the culinary metaphor, surveying the broad landscape that stretches from chick lit to experimental film to cookbooks. The secondary project of this book is to issue a call to Asian American literary critics to take seriously the realm of food studies as it pertains to epistemological and methodological approaches to diasporic literatures. Food, Mannur argues, is not just a signifier for identity, but is a valuable "idiom to imagine subjectivity" as well as providing insight into the various problematics of diasporicity.

Among Mannur's chief concerns in this study is the relationship between gender and food. Because domestic, culinary labor is so often gendered female, Mannur necessarily engages intimately with several aspects of this complex, often silently troubled relationship. Beginning with the interplay between nostalgia and culinary nationalism, Mannur argues that a cookbook like Madhur Jaffrey's *An Invitation to*

Indian Cooking can only exist within the diasporic context because it relies heavily on a reified image of India as a faraway place, a "back there" that lends authenticity to the recipes within, appealing to culinary tourists seeking an "authentic" Indian experience. At the same time, this nostalgia functions differently for exiles and immigrants: it manifests itself as "feelings" that enable them to fabricate a simpler time within a fixed imaginary space called "home." In this way, a recipe for eggplant bartha becomes amplified into more than just instructions for a dish, it becomes a narrative meant to bridge the present and the past as a salve for the migrant soul while also presenting a flattened image of what all Indians eat, regardless of regional dietary practices.

Perhaps the most compelling portion of Mannur's study is her discussion of a Baudrillardian "hyperreal eating." She explains that highly commodified consumer products, especially skin- and hair-care products, evoke taboo foodstuffs like decadent desserts and allow consumers to "sublimate eating into a nonphysical activity" (84). Hyperreal eating both feeds off of and stokes the fear of excess and fat (which in the current cultural imaginary is both abject and Other) that dominates Western aesthetic consciousness. This environment of hyperreal eating, Mannur argues, sets the stage nicely for ethnic-themed novels that liberally deploy the culinary idiom as a means to present otherness in a palatable fashion. The culinary-themed ethnic novel renders the Other fit for consumption, or, as bell hooks writes in *Black Looks*, "ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that enlivens the dull dish" (159).

However, the texts discussed to this point, namely cookbooks produced for consumption of India by white Westerners, are representations of India and Indian

women produced for consumption by and for diaspora that do not necessarily contend with a colonial legacy and do not necessarily care about the Anglophone reader. Within the texts I consider in my study, ethnic food is put to a different purpose. Food is deployed to negotiate the constant tension between Otherness and assimilation, the authors staking out emotional, cultural, and social terrain that is particular to their experience as ethnic subjects. Each text represents a different strategy for negotiating this tension, from Ashima's improvisation in *The Namesake* to depictions of actual cooking in *The Hindi-Bindi Club* to the generation of outrageous recipes in *Serving Crazy with Curry*.

Pantry Staples: Jhumpa Lahiri's Recipes for Negotiating Diasporic Class and Gender

Broadly speaking, the ways in which the characters in *The Namesake* use food to hold Otherness and assimilation in tension with one another is directly linked to the tension between rejecting Big Food and eagerly consuming it. For Ashima Ganguli, the discourse of food reveals how her connection to India inhibits her ability (or perhaps expresses her reluctance) to assimilate while also drawing a parallel to her son Gogol's preferences for "American" food. For Gogol, to be American is to consume Big Food, in effect, eating the Other. For Ashima, to be Indian is to enact a form of Slow Food facilitated via improvisation and approximation, preserving food practices that are intimately local to her, even if not geographically local.

When the reader is introduced to Ashima, she is late in her first pregnancy and attempting to recreate *bhelpuri*, a common snack food she enjoyed back home in India, from within her tiny, lonesome kitchen in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in the late 1960s. Instead of puffed rice she uses Rice Krispies, Planters peanuts, red onion, salt, lemon juice, and green chilies, and wishes she had mustard oil to further recreate the experience of the ubiquitous foodstuff of Calcutta. She has no recipe and must improvise with the materials on hand; this scene speaks to the phase of Ashima's life as a migrant: a newly married, young mother-to-be who is trying to re-create India from within the space of her kitchen and relying heavily on substitutes. While "[A]s usual, there's something missing" (1) serves as an initial obstacle within her narrative, it is one that ultimately helps her to fulfill the meaning of her name, "without borders."

Yet in Ashima's attempts to maintain her connections to home, some substitutes simply will not suffice. Finding her neighbor Judy's proffered brown rice unacceptable, Ashima takes matters into her own hands, signaling a sea change in her status as a cloistered migrant wife: "She changes and dresses Gogol and puts him into the navy blue, white-wheeled pram inherited from Alan and Judy. For the first time, she pushes him through the balmy streets of Cambridge, to Purity Supreme, to buy a bag of long-grain rice" (34). Ashima's rice crisis serves two purposes: First, it underscores the fact that she is decidedly not Judy, the home-birthing earth mother whose rice will not serve as a shortcut in this situation, despite the 1960s counterculture's best efforts to make food an identificatory mechanism. Michael Pollan explains in *The Omnivore's Dilemma*:

> For a host of reasons that seem ridiculous in retrospect, brown foods of all kinds – rice, bread, wheat, eggs, sugar, soy sauce, tamari – were deemed morally superior to white foods. Brown foods were less adulterated by industry, of course, but just as important, eating them allowed you to express your solidarity with the world's brown peoples. (143-144)

But Ashima cannot or will not reciprocate this attempt at identification on Judy's part. Indeed, her rejection of the brown rice simply underscores Judy's misreading of Ashima as "like" her and situates Ashima outside of the flattened category of "brown person" so desperately in need of white women's identification. In this respect, Ashima is unable to "only connect" with Judy on these terms, because her need for connection is broader in scope.

The second purpose of Ashima's rice crisis is that it drives her out of private space and into the public sphere. Her loyalty to the "right" rice forces her into action and instills in her a limited agency that enables her to maintain the ties to her homeland from her Cambridge kitchen and later in her home in the suburbs; her labor in the kitchen functions to facilitate a specific, fraught consumption of India that complicates Gogol's emergence into the marketplace as an Indian-American consumer. This incident also marks Ashima's movement into a second phase as a diasporic Indian cook, in which she becomes the organizing culinary force that brings and keeps the migrant Indians of the Eastern Seaboard together.

In *States of Exception*, Keya Ganguly describes the ways in which Indian women maneuver their way through foreign kitchens in their attempts to "spark that epic

relationship with the motherland" through the exchange of imprecise recipes that challenge the interlocutor to fill in the gaps in information in order to replicate the desired dish as authentically as possible (125). When this transformation of raw ingredients to a cooked final dish takes place away from the homeland, the cook must rely on shortcuts in order to duplicate as closely as possible the original recipe, even if the authenticity of the end result is like Ashima's *bhelpuri*: not quite right. But the dish with something missing ends up being a viable substitute within the migrant context; Ganguly suggests that in this way, wives create what Salman Rushdie has termed an "imaginary homeland" from their kitchens. This notion is reflected in Lahiri's description of Ashima's adaptation to (culinary) life in America and her ad hoc role as mother hen to recently emigrated young women: "The wives, homesick and bewildered, turn to Ashima for advice, and she tells them about the carp that's sold in Chinatown, that it's possible to make halwa from Cream of Wheat. The families drop by one another's homes on Sunday afternoons. They drink tea with sugar and evaporated milk and eat shrimp cutlets fried in saucepans" (38). As the veteran wife, Ashima teaches the newcomers the shortcuts necessary in order to reproduce the cuisine of home in America. In this way, she helps facilitate the experience of the "epic relationship" with the homeland via the dinner plate.

Her initial movement out of the domestic space, that desperate move to procure the right kind of rice, as well as all of her subsequent journeys hence, has imbued in her the authority to usher the new immigrant women through the difficult act of adaptation (not assimilation); ironically, that authority is limited to the domestic space from whence she emerged, passing on her tips on where to find good fish, as well as sharing her

shortcuts for ingredient substitutions for sweets, and using a saucepan as an alternative to deep-frying shrimp cutlets.

Ashima's creativity enables her to author a diasporic cuisine, albeit one that does not manifest itself in a lasting material text. Indeed, recreating the foods of home becomes a theory of action.[76] While Appadurai writes, "Where once improvisation was snatched out of the glacial undertow of habitus, habitus now has to be painstakingly reinforced in the face of life-worlds that are frequently in flux" (56), it is my argument that Ashima painstakingly reinforces habitus *via* improvisation, thereby enacting a form of cultural reproduction unique to the diasporic subject, particularly the migrant wife. Ashima's improvisations create that "only connect" with her homeland by creating a food community and setting forth a formless text that expresses her lived experience as a migrant wife.

Through this expression of subjectivity, Ashima becomes the means by which her Bengali community can indulge in the foods of home, as well as the way in which her firstborn experiences his first food; in this role, she ostensibly serves as the primary transmitter of Gogol's Bengali identity, nourishing him with a negotiated version of India based on substitutions, while also facilitating his entry into the world of American consumption. Just as she will serve him *payesh* (rice pudding) alongside a slice of bakery cake for his birthday every year (39), a resonant symbol of his hyphenated identity,

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[76] See Bourdieu, Pierre. *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998. Print; and *Outline of the Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977. Print.

Ashima provides Gogol with the culinary entry points into American middle-class culture.

> In the supermarket they let Gogol fill the cart with items that he and Sonia, but not they, consume: individually wrapped slices of cheese, mayonnaise, tuna fish, hot dogs. For Gogol's lunches they stand at the deli to buy cold cuts, and in the mornings Ashima makes sandwiches with bologna or roast beef. At his insistence, she concedes and makes him an American dinner once a week as a treat. Shake 'n Bake chicken or Hamburger Helper prepared with ground lamb. (65)

The common denominator among the foods listed here is that they are all heavily processed convenience items. All are easy and quick to prepare and are produced with the busy middle-class American family in mind. There are few steps in the preparation process, and, in the case of Shake 'n Bake and Hamburger Helper, all the spices and flavorings are included in the package; there is no recipe to follow, and all the consumer has to add is the meat, allowing little room for improvisation or creativity – Ashima's substitution of lamb for beef excepted. On the surface, there is no meaning behind these meals in American culture, no ritual behind their preparation, yet for Gogol, they are a "treat." They represent the exotic sheen of American-ness that is lacking in the "bland vegetarian food" found at the *pujos* (religious festivals honoring Hindu deities) he and his sister are forced to attend twice a year, an interesting reversal of the exotic and the

familiar vis á vis "Americanness" (64).[77] For Gogol, embracing Big Food means assimilating into American lifeways. And yet, the mimicry of Hamburger Helper made with ground lamb instead of beef reminds the reader of the Gangulis' "almost the same but not quite"-ness that no amount of Jif peanut butter and Coca-Cola can erase (Bhabha 86). The grocery store and the kitchen become the means by which identity becomes porous for the Ganguli children while at the same time remaining the space within which Ashima bridges the gulf between Boston and Calcutta.

Where Ashima, as a diasporic Indian, struggles to negotiate a hyphenated subjectivity because she has native identity in India as a starting point, Gogol is always already in crisis due to the accident of his birth on "foreign" soil and of his unusual Russian name. Gogol must find a way to manipulate his cultural surroundings in order to alleviate his ongoing crisis of identity. He learns that there is a term for his condition: ABCD, American-born confused *deshi*. He "knows that his parents and all their friends always refer to India simply as *desh*. But Gogol never thinks of India as desh. He thinks of it as Americans do, as India" (118). While laboring in the hospital just before Gogol's birth, Ashima reads "a tattered copy of *Desh* magazine that she'd brought to read from her plane ride to Boston and still cannot bring herself to throw away" (6). *Desh*, until the late 1990s, was a Bengali-language literary journal, and serves as the most tangible material connection to India for Ashima in her new life. Ashima can touch *Desh* (and, by extension, her *desh*), and "the printed pages of Bengali type […] are a perpetual comfort to her," even when she cannot indulge in authentic *bhelpuri* (6). Gogol, on the other

[77] With thanks to Olga Herrera.

hand, finds and uses a more ephemeral means of mitigating his conflicted identity: the consumption of (as opposed to the creation or assembly of) food. Dick Hebdige writes in *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* that the challenge to hegemony takes place at "the profoundly superficial level of appearances: that is, at the level of signs" (17). Gogol uses food and commensality as the semiotic challenge to what's expected of him as a Bengali American.

Gogol's introduction to the world of food takes place at the rice ceremony, a ritual "meant to introduce him to a lifetime of consumption, a meal to inaugurate the tens of thousands of unremembered meals to come" (40). This moment is significant to Gogol's narrative in that food and its consumption plays such a considerable role in how he negotiates his subjectivity as a hyphenated American. During the ceremony, "[he] is entranced, doesn't squirm or turn away, opens his mouth obediently for each and every course. He takes his payesh three times. Ashima's eyes fill with tears as Gogol's mouth eagerly invites the spoon" (40). It is through his mouth that Gogol receives culture, an act that ultimately serves to help create and sustain the crisis of identity that dogs him throughout the novel. It is fitting, then, that his refusal to choose, to establish loyalty to one identification or another, sees its inception at the ceremony meant to introduce him to the act of consuming food:

> To predict his future path in life, Gogol is offered a plate holding a clump of cold Cambridge soil dug up from the backyard, a ballpoint pen, and a dollar bill, to see if he will be a landowner, scholar, or businessman. Most children will grab at one of them, sometimes all of them, but Gogol

> touches nothing. … [F]orced at six months to confront his destiny, does he begin to cry. (40)

Gogol's moment of crisis as an infant is replayed in various ways throughout his narrative. It is as though his failure to connect within this context as a barely sentient being dooms Gogol to being perpetually ambivalent and un-situated in his identity.

Just as he uncomfortably straddles the two competing worlds to which he belongs — the interior world of his home, within which his mother and father attempt to recreate India, and the external world of America — Gogol negotiates his ambivalent identity using competing yet complementary strategies: mimicry, as defined by Homi Bhabha, and imitation, as discussed by Arjun Apppadurai. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha defines mimicry by the colonial subject as the creation of a recognizable Other "as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (86). He goes on to note that the mimicking Other is a "partial presence" in the colonial context; for the purposes of this discussion, the host culture of America functions as the colonial context. The mimicry results in the Other being fixed into a "partial presence […] both 'incomplete' and 'virtual'" (86). It is as a virtual or incomplete presence that Gogol attempts to imitate those whose identities he covets and consumes. On the subject of imitation, Appadurai argues in *Modernity at Large* that it is a key component of the work of consumption, which is the means by which social disciplines and practices are inscribed on the body, based on the rhythms of time. He writes,

> [A]ny consumption system that strives for freedom from habit is pushed toward an aesthetic of the ephemeral. […] [T]he small habits of

> consumption, typically daily food habits, can perform a percussive role in organizing large-scale consumption patterns, which may be made up of much more complex orders of repetition and improvisation. The methodological moral here may be put as follows: where imitation seems to dominate, repetition might be lurking. (67-68)

Where Ashima's ephemeral improvisations centered on a temporal rhythm, so do Gogol's imitations of the Ratliffs. As he becomes further entrenched in the cycle of imitation and repetition, the repetition of this ritual will absorb Gogol into the Ratliff family. Gogol's desire to break from the habits established by his parents lands him in another family's consumption pattern, which further sets the course for his trajectory as a first-generation Bengali American attempting to negotiate his identity. However, his status as a partial presence with crucial parts of his identity having been withheld threatens his assimilation into the American upper class.

Before he can imitate, however, Gogol must first mimic, as imitation is a more advanced form of negotiation within this context. Gogol rarely ever seems in danger of identifying himself as more Indian than American – a choice such as that would be counterintuitive to his way of moving through the world, not because he considers himself to be particularly American, but because he resists considering himself Indian. Food is the bellwether of Gogol's identity, what reminds him of his American-ness while he is separated from America and forced to live as an Indian. Although he cannot articulate it and does not overtly choose it, Gogol recognizes American meals, or, at the very least, meals that are not Indian, as his own. Separated from his parents on the plane

to India, where the family will spend six months, Gogol asserts his limited independence by ordering a Bloody Mary (80) and savoring the last Western-style meal he will have for half a year, an omelet with a grilled tomato on top (81), not only asserting his American-ness, but also miming adulthood; he is, after all, only in tenth grade. In India, where he looks like everyone else but is decidedly different, he and his sister secretly confess their "excruciating cravings, for hamburgers or a slice of pepperoni pizza or a cold glass of milk" (84). Similarly, upon the family's return to America, Gogol is relieved to receive his first non-Indian meal (87). Taking in one last Western meal, making it a part of himself, before he enters his Indian purgatory is almost a devotional act, as is his deliberate removal of the silverware from its packet on the return flight home from India – a sort of transnational communion in which Gogol becomes one with the revered body of the culture that is neither completely home nor host.

From those fumbling attempts at negotiation, the narrative moves to a more sophisticated leap: Gogol's attempt at class mobility. The tensions borne from that movement are charted through his consumption of gourmet meals, to which his girlfriend, Maxine Ratliff, introduces him. At the inception of their relationship, she invites him to dinner at the opulent uptown Manhattan home she shares with her parents:

> Maxine lights a pair of candles. Gerald tops off the wine. Lydia serves the food on broad white plates: a thin piece of steak rolled into a bundle and tied with string, sitting in a pool of dark sauce, the green beans boiled so that they are still crisp. A bowl of small, round, roasted red potatoes is passed around, and afterward a salad. They eat appreciatively,

> commenting on the tenderness of the meat, the freshness of the beans. His own mother would never have served so few dishes to a guest. She would have kept her eyes trained on Maxine's plate, insisting she have seconds and then thirds. The table would have been lined with a row of serving bowls so that people could help themselves. But Lydia pays no attention to Gogol's plate. She makes no announcement indicating that there is more. Silas sits at Lydia's feet as they eat, and at one point Lydia slices off a generous portion of her meat and feeds it to him off of her palm. (133)

The scene Lahiri writes here is one of Continental decadence masquerading as a leisurely family dinner. Lydia, Maxine's mother, has prepared *boeuf a la ficelle*, an expensive and time-consuming poached beef dish. It calls for beef tenderloin, which is a pricey cut of meat, and requires several steps in the preparation process, from trimming to binding, overnight refrigeration, preparation for the broth for poaching, and so on. The simplicity of the crisp green beans and roasted new potatoes belies their status as staples of haute cuisine, and the salad as the closing course is a uniquely European conceit (salad is typically the first or second course in American dining practice). The Ratliffs clearly view eating as a pleasurable way to pass an evening, not a meta-ritual fraught with meaning, as is the case when Ashima stages her Bengali buffets. Gogol is seduced by this commensal ritual, a scene that gestures to the dinner party in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, in which Mrs. Ramsey serves *Boeuf en Daube*, a French ("of course it was

French," 151) beef stew that Marthe the cook labors over for three days. The comparison here suggests that colonialism has a life and vitality removed from the metropole.[78]

This dinner scene stands in stark contrast to the scene described at Gogol's rice ceremony and at later weekend dinners, with the paper plates that have to be tripled in order to support the weight of the wide array of offerings (39) and where Ashoke and Ashima serve more as caterers than hosts at their parties (141). Here, Lydia serves just enough food to satisfy her dining companions; what is there should be enough. The whiteness of her china dishes recall the whiteness of the paper plates of Ashima's that will end up discarded, stained with grease and weakened by the weight, both metaphorical and literal, they have had to bear. Lydia's plates, likely very fine, lightweight china, will be washed and stored and reused in the same context again and again. From Gogol's perspective, the plates and the dinner itself carry little cultural weight for the family and are, therefore, endlessly reusable. Ganguly writes, "Food, eaten Indian-style with one's fingers, is inescapably about the synesthetic charge of touch and taste; consumed collectively and conspicuously within everyone's vision, it also becomes an expression of a mode of being in the (new) world, a visual presentation of the self in everyday life" (136). Where Ashima's dinners are about a group of immigrants and their reluctant children with American accents gathering to dine as a collective with excessive amounts of biryani, carp in yogurt sauce, dal, and hours of conversation in Bengali in order to mark their presence in their new world, the Ratliffs' meals are private acts of pleasure dedicated to discussion of museum exhibits, movies, restaurants, and the other

[78] With thanks to Katy Young Evans.

enjoyments of privilege (133). While the Gangulis' weekend meals are orgies of bourgeois conspicuous consumption and "serial communality,"[79] it only takes one gesture by Lydia to demonstrate the equally conspicuous, yet much more privileged, nature of the Ratliffs' consumption: she slices off a chunk of expensive meat and feeds it to her dog. It occurs to Gogol that "this is the way the Ratliffs eat every night" (134); his prior experiences at table could not be any more different than they are in this moment. Having moved away from Hamburger Helper as a means of mediating his cultural identity, Gogol takes the excess and opulence for granted and consumes it just as he does the actual food, inserting himself into a cycle of eating the Other while also being the Other who is civilized and consumed.

Indeed, Lahiri goes to great lengths to underscore the profound differences in Ashima and Lydia's relationships and approaches to cooking. While the reader is never privy to the appearance and inner workings of Ashima's kitchen, a close reading of Lydia's kitchen reveals her to be a gourmand who views cooking and eating as a pastime rather than as labor: "The walls are adorned with prints of roosters and herbs and an arrangement of copper skillets. Ceramic plates and platters are displayed on open shelves, along with what seems to be hundreds of cookbooks, food encyclopedias, and volumes of essays about eating" (130). Both kitchens are worldly, cosmopolitan. For Lydia, recipes are to be collected, collated, bound, and displayed, much like the textile collection she curates at the Met (134); if, according to Appadurai, enumeration was "the central technique for social control" (117) within colonial India, then the volumes of essays

[79] With thanks to Snehal Shingavi.

about eating alongside the cookbooks and food encyclopedias are a formalization (and commodification) of the urge to consume and digest the Other. On the other hand, Ashima's kitchen is the culinary hub of one point on the diasporic Indian ethnoscape, a place through which recently (and not-so-recently) migrated families flow, filling their bellies and finding community and shared values (Appadurai 33). Ashima's work is not just to nourish her family, but also to engage in a theory of action fueled by a sense of duty to India. Lahiri's portrayal of the type of work being done by each respective mother seems to privilege Ashima's, not because it is in some way more "authentic" than Lydia's, but because Ashima's work in the kitchen serves to facilitate both Gogol's "bothness" and her own, whereas Lydia's work aids Gogol's attempts to elide his own Otherness.

At the outset of Gogol and Maxine's relationship, the Ratliff family does not hesitate to remind Gogol of his status as Other. Lydia tells Gogol, "You could be Italian" (134); Lydia's comment suggests that Gogol's skin is somewhat fair, which allows her to forgive his brownness and legitimize his presence at the dinner table, in that Italy is part of Europe, which is obviously the overarching cultural influence at this table. The Indian subcontinent, on the other hand, is simply too "ethnic" for this context. Once his position as a person of color has been acknowledged, rendered familiar, and forgiven, there is space for him to imitate their habits in an attempt to become one of them and to allow himself to be absorbed by them in a process of mutual consumption. As was the case with the airline meals, the act of eating serves as the act of assimilation — when Gogol

partakes of these high-class, high-dollar meals, they become a part of him and he becomes a part of them. He is both assimilating and assimilated. The novelty of this lavish lifestyle gives way to routine, one with a decidedly pedagogical bent:

> He learns to love the food she and her parents eat, the polenta and risotto, the bouillabaisse and osso buco, the meat baked in parchment paper. He comes to expect the weight of their flatware in his hands, and to keep the cloth napkin, still partially folded, on his lap. He learns that one does not grate Parmesan cheese over pasta dishes containing seafood. He learns not to put wooden spoons in the dishwasher, as he had mistakenly done one evening when he was helping to clean up. The nights he spends there, he learns to wake up earlier than he is used to […] He learns to anticipate, every evening, the sound of a cork emerging from a fresh bottle of wine. (137)

Lahiri's repetition of the word "learns" underscores Appadurai's point: through the repetition of the cyclical practice of nightly dinners, the unfamiliar becomes familiar as Gogol inserts himself seamlessly into the Ratliff family, adopting their culinary tastes and practices as his own. He is, in effect, following the recipe tacitly set forth for him by the Ratliffs in order to transform himself from raw to cooked, an Other who has been collected, curated, cultivated, and made more palatable.

And yet, this assimilation is not an entirely comfortable act for Gogol. Bhabha writes, "mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a disavowal" (86). This disavowal via mimicry is illustrated when Lahiri's narrator reveals that

"[Gogol] is conscious of the fact that his immersion in Maxine's family is a betrayal of his own" (141); but he refuses to choose, simply staying the course until outside forces interrupt his trajectory. His imitation and mimicry of Maxine's lifestyle and his status as a partial presence in that sphere derails his class ascension after his father's death, as Maxine is unable to accept his belated sense of duty to his family.

When Ashoke dies while on sabbatical in Cleveland, Gogol returns to his parents' house after traveling to Ohio to tie up his father's affairs. It is during the ten days on a mourner's diet of dal and vegetables (no meat or fish) that Gogol feels a sense of connection to his cultural heritage. It is through the observation of Hindu custom that Gogol finds comfort in the wake of his father's death and awakens his sense of himself as an Indian-American. Indeed, as he retreats into the family house, surrounded by the Gangulis' huge Bengali community, Gogol turns toward his parent culture and its mourning rhythms. It is in the aftermath of Ashoke's death that Gogol's partial presence in Maxine's life troubles their relationship, as she fails to understand "being excluded from the family's plans to travel to Calcutta […] and scatter Ashoke's ashes in the Ganges" (188). It is as though Gogol, via his guilt, revokes his disavowal and enacts a "consumer revolt" that allows him to turn away from the life that had so seduced him in the form of Maxine and her parents (Appadurai 72). But it is his parents' mobility and his mother's improvisations that made such a shift possible for Gogol; unfortunately for Gogol, while his father's death is the impetus for his attempts to connect with his mother, it is the impetus for her disengagement.

For Ashima, her husband's death serves as her movement into the final phase of her life as a migrant wife and into a freedom she has not previously known. She has faithfully fulfilled her *dharma* as not only a proper wife and mother, but also as a loyal subject to India, having done her part to sustain an entire community's ties to the homeland. Indeed, Gogol observes at the Christmas Eve gathering/farewell dinner that closes the novel that the Bengali community that Ashoke and Ashima cultivated over the years "has come to rely on [Ashima]" to bring them together, to bridge the gap between India and America not only via commensal gatherings, but also "to organize [Christmas], to convert it, to introduce the tradition to those who are new," just as she had assisted the new brides in their roles as diasporic homemakers needing to adapt to their new circumstances (286). Because she has sold the family house and will now split her time between America and India, her years of "single-handedly throw[ing] parties for dozens of people" are over (276). And, rather than being "solicitous and watchful" (141), Ashima looks forward to partaking in the meal alongside her guests, hungrily eyeing the final meal of dal, roasted cauliflower, eggplant, lamb korma, and pantuas[80] she has prepared as a farewell to her Stateside friends (277). Ashima's desire to enjoy the food she has prepared signifies her break from the collective and her emergence as a citizen of the world, one who will no longer "have to go to the trouble of making yogurt from half-and-half and sandesh from ricotta cheese. She will not have to make her own croquettes. They will be available to her from restaurants, brought up to the flat by servants, bearing

[80] Fried semolina balls sweetened with milk and sugar.

a taste that after all these years she has still not quite managed, to her entire satisfaction to replicate" (276).

Ashima is now a woman of leisure. Her primary role is no longer one of laborer, but of consumer. Her efforts to remain loyal to her Indian identity — and, by extension, India itself — via replicating the food of the motherland while abroad are repaid in not only her reprieve from cooking, but also in that she will actually not have to lift a finger for her food, except to convey it to her mouth. Her new state of being forecloses on three decades of labor: she is no longer a wife, her children are grown, she is no longer charged with the duty of feeding a family and running interference in the battleground of competing cultures. Her work dissipates before her eyes, "the world for which she is responsible, which she has created, which is everywhere around her, needing to be packed up, given away, thrown out bit by bit" (280). At the end of the party, she will give away the leftovers in the pots they were cooked in and, as Gogol observes, "there will be no trace that they were ever there, no house to enter, no name in the telephone directory. Nothing to signify the years his family has lived here, no evidence of the effort, the achievement it had been" (281). The family's presence in the house on Pemberton Road becomes a palimpsest, written over by future residents who will rip out carpeting, put fresh paint on the wall, and cultivate their own narratives. There are no artifacts left behind to tell the Gangulis' story, no pots and pans, no cookbooks, no escaped recipe cards.

One dynamic that Lahiri does not explore in *The Namesake* is the exchange of recipes or cooking pedagogy between mother and child; given the gendered nature of

cooking and its portrayal in literature, this is unsurprising, regardless of the ethnic context. I have considered the ways in which the urge to "only connect" misfires in *The Namesake*, in that when Gogol attempts to connect with his family, Ashima shifts the terms, leaving Gogol nostalgic for a life (and a cuisine) that no longer exists for him. I now shift my focus to portraits of mothers and daughters who negotiate their relationships with each other and attempt to narrate their identities within the kitchen via sharing recipes, connecting with one another through a gendered discourse of cooking. As these narratives progress, the recipe shifts from a focus on food to recipes for living, shedding the vestiges of colonialism within a cosmopolitan, diasporic context.

Silence and Sanity: Cooking and Writing the Self in *Serving Crazy with Curry*

Within this text, we see a movement toward the recipe becoming an artifact; where Ashima authored a formless, oral diasporic cuisine (albeit one that informs the trajectory of her first-generation children's attempts to connect and assimilate via food) in *The Namesake*, there are several written recipes within this novel, and they emanate from Devi, the American-born daughter. Saroj, the migrant mother, begins the project of writing and recording recipes but abandons it because there is no existing model for her to emulate. Devi, by virtue of her access to Western structures of self-narration (namely, therapy), is able to successfully narrate herself using the discourse of recipes and cooking. This raises questions about who is able to write and why, what they are able to say about themselves, and within what context. Devi, through the act of writing, transgressively transcends the enclosure and barrenness of her mother's experience from

within the marginalized space of the kitchen. In the process, she authors a new narrative by virtue of the resources available to her as a first-generation American, simultaneously rejecting, accepting, and recovering her mother's voice in the process. Within this new form, the first-generation Indian woman can express her lived experience in ways that her predecessors could not.

Serving Crazy with Curry follows the story of the Veturi family, with the narrative centering on the attempted suicide and subsequent recovery of the family's younger daughter, Devi. Avi and Saroj Veturi are wealthy Indian émigrés living in the Bay Area, having relocated from India in the 1970s so that Avi could start a computer company with his friend, Vikram. Saroj, who had pursued Avi ardently in India, was resistant to the move, but went along with it anyway. Their older daughter, Shobha, was a year old when the family left India; Devi was born Stateside three years later. While Shobha has achieved professional success as a software engineer, Devi has struggled to remain employed at a string of failed Internet startups. The opening chapter depicts her attempted suicide; Saroj finds her in the bathtub while dropping in unannounced. After the suicide, Devi stops talking, moves into her parents' home, and starts cooking. Over the course of the novel, we learn that Devi has suffered a miscarriage, the pregnancy being a result of an affair she had with her brother-in-law, Girish. Shobha and Devi's relationship with their mother is strained and plump with resentment, but they are both quite fond of their maternal grandmother, Vasu, who comes for an extended stay every summer. Saroj and Vasu have a very strained relationship, and Saroj and Avi's marriage is silently on the rocks.

From the outset of Devi's story, the reader understands that Saroj is Devi's scapegoat, the figure she pushes against the most in her sustained attempts at self-discernment. She is dismayed to realize that "she was more like her mother: a complete failure at everything she ever attempted – life, love, children, job, relationships, finances, everything" (6). It is this realization that contributes to Devi's suicide attempt; it is inevitable that it is Saroj, dropping off mangoes unannounced, who discovers Devi bleeding in her bathtub and saves her life by calling the paramedics. It is also clear in the novel that Saroj has mothered via food, entering her daughters' homes and leaving Indian food in their refrigerators, along with long answering machine messages explaining the intrusion (10). Much of Saroj's identity is portrayed via her work in the kitchen, asserting her Indian-ness through strict adherence to the proper, commonly accepted ingredients of Indian food: "Why can't we make a duck curry or rabbit curry instead of a chicken curry? Do we always have to have the same kind of chicken curry? Devi would want to know. Because Indians don't eat duck or rabbit or deer or any of those other repulsive meats, Saroj would respond" (19).

Saroj uses food to differentiate herself from Americans and to reinforce her identity as an Indian, even though she has lived in America for 25 years. Similarly, her daughters use food and cooking to differentiate themselves from their mother. Devi "would tell [Saroj] about all the restaurants she went to and how the food there was *so much* better than Saroj's," while Shobha "believed cooking was for simpering housewives, not for smart, intelligent career women" (20). Yet cooking seems to be the primary means by which "always-cooking Saroj" has come to define herself, with no

small amount of bravado: “Saroj didn’t believe in cookbooks. ‘What do they know?’ she’d say. She knew how much and what from experience. That was the only way to make good food, experience and trial and error. Devi knew her mother’s life revolved around cooking. Always chopping, dicing, and/or planning. It was such an uncomplicated life, it made Devi envious” (65). Saroj has rejected the cookbook, the printed recipe, and relies on her own culinary knowledge, an aggregate of her lifetime of work in the kitchen, to produce her dishes, but it is knowledge that goes nowhere: it is not recorded and her daughters do not value it.

According to Saroj, all of her dishes are “famous” (102), braggadocio that smacks of overcompensation by a woman who has hidden within her kitchen as a means of coping with the trauma of migration, a journey that she undertook only at the behest of her husband. We learn that in effect, migration happened to Saroj:

> If he had said that he expected her support or had ordered her to do his bidding, Saroj would probably have protested, but he said that he needed her, that he couldn’t make it without her and Saroj’s resolve weakened. Shobha was barely a year old when Saroj packed her family bags and moved to the United States. Her resentment toward the country started during the long interminable flight. It seemed like it would never end. (85)

Rather than resent Avi for uprooting their family against her wishes (and for manipulating her), Saroj resents America, which, it seems, has caused her to fetishize Indian-ness, to want to cling to and magnify her own Indian-ness. In fact, she seems prejudiced against Americans and those who would deign to act like Americans.

Ultimately, Saroj is preoccupied with hers and others' performance of Indian-ness and finds most wanting (apart from herself), disliking her America-born, Oxford-educated son-in-law, Girish, for being "not Indian enough, too much of an *angrez*, too British, too American, too much of a foreigner" (17) to condemning lazy Stateside Indians for using canned kidney beans instead of dried (102). Indeed, Saroj's performance of Indian-ness is most deeply rooted in her emphasis on scratch cooking; she practices a form of diasporic Slow Food, if you will.

Saroj's anxiety regarding her post-migration Indian identity extends to anxiety regarding mothering. She fears rejection by her daughters and desperately wants a meaningful relationships with them, hence the unannounced visits to their homes: "She didn't bother to call before she went to visit her daughters. She was always afraid that they'd make an excuse and not want her to come. To avoid dealing with that rejection, she just dropped by; if they weren't at home, she would be disappointed but not hurt" (16). Anxiety about mothering — both her own and others' — extends beyond her own home and family; no mother's mothering is immune from consumption and criticism, including the daughter of a friend she encounters at the grocery store: "Anita was seven months' pregnant and chewing on a Mars bar. […] 'So, Anita, how are you feeling? You shouldn't be eating sweets, *nahi*? Megha told me you have gestational diabetes'"(125). Saroj's commentary on others' mothering, even before they have given birth speaks to a broader cultural issue, that of the mother as a site of discussion and scrutiny. The mother belongs to everyone, even — perhaps especially — other mothers. Here we see a concern

with woman-ness that Saroj magnifies and projects onto all other women, in much the same way that she projects her concern with Indian-ness onto everyone else in her orbit.

However, Saroj begins to see the limitations of the life she has created for herself in her adherence to the expectations of the Indian wife and mother:

> [W]hen Saroj saw her family going off to work, having lives of their own, businesses they were a part of, a world beyond the confines of their homes, she felt stifled within the boundaries she'd set for herself. A career would have allowed her access to the outside world, would have given her something else beyond the barren existence of unwanted wife and unneeded mother. (83)

The use of the word "barren" is significant here for two reasons: one, that to describe the life of a mother as "barren" is paradoxical, in that motherhood is typically the direct result of fertility. Secondly, Saroj's own daughters both suffer from barrenness or infertility: Shobha has had a partial hysterectomy due to endometriosis (52) and Devi has just suffered a miscarriage. Saroj uses her work within the kitchen as a means to assert her national identity as well as her identity as a woman, yet even she recognizes these efforts as barren, nonproductive, as evidenced by her own bitterness and lack of fulfillment and her daughters' reproductive challenges. While it is true that the portrayal of Shoba's infertility traffics in the patriarchal stereotype of the barren career woman, the implication here is that everything Saroj has produced during her tenure in America has been the equivalent of casting seeds onto the road. Saroj's entire life in America has centered on and emanated from her work in the kitchen, the perfectly managed space she

considers her crowning glory within the house built to her specifications (70-1); it has been the safe, if (self-) circumscribed space within which she shielded and distracted herself from the various traumas of migration. This tactic has failed, but it has created a space for her daughter to succeed.

Before she can rehabilitate her mother's life in the kitchen, Devi must first push against it violently. This process begins on the drive home from the hospital as Saroj chatters nervously to her newly mute daughter:

> "I have hot-hot *samosas*," Saroj said as she stopped at a red light. "And I made your favorite *pudhina* chutney." Chutney? Did her mother really think that she was interested in chutney at this point in her life? And of all the things to cook when your suicidal daughter comes home – the same old mint chutney? Nothing new, nothing different? Nothing to say, *The world has changed. The food in our house definitely has. You can live now?* (60-61)

Here Devi's expectations clash against Saroj's coping mechanisms. Additionally, Saroj's nervous chatter reiterates what has already been established about this character, which is that preparing food and feeding her loved ones is the primary means by which she nurtures. Devi, failing or refusing to acknowledge that her mother's offers of food are expressions of love and concern, silently expresses a need for a different kind of nurturing and scapegoats her mother in the process. Why would Devi expect the *food*, of all things, to change? Of course, it is not really chutney and samosas she resents and rejects; it is Saroj herself.

Devi's unspoken rage facilitates a focus on the process of writing, particularly after her therapist suggests that she keep a journal in order to sort through and process the emotions that led up to and follow her suicide. Initially resistant to the notion, Devi grapples with the prospect, wondering, "Would writing a note somehow give her the words it would take to tell the truth?" (44). After returning home from the hospital, Devi takes up residence in her childhood bedroom, where she finds Saroj's empty recipe book:

> There was a smell to it, that of turmeric and cloves, as if the book belonged in a kitchen. When she read the only entry, she found out that the book had been meant for the kitchen. It was one of Saroj's old notebooks, from the days when she probably used cookbooks. When she didn't believe she knew it all but needed to learn. On the second page of the book, in Saroj's neat handwriting, was the first and only recipe. Devi recognized it immediately as Saroj's "famous" goat curry. (66)

That Saroj's abandoned book smells of turmeric and cloves speaks to her somatic connection to the kitchen, and also serves as a metonym for Saroj herself. The empty pages preceding the sole entry in the book represent the assumed blank slate of Saroj's life, in that her family members are dismissive of housewives in general and seem to hold Saroj in particular in low regard. I reproduce the recipe here, as it provides a number of important landmarks in the way the recipe evolves over the course of the novel.

> *Jorhat, April 15, 1970*
>
> GIRIJA'S GOAT SABZI

Get good goat and clean it well. Chop out some of the thick fat but let the rest stay, it doesn't hurt and the fat content will give the sabzi *more taste. Cut some onions and fry in oil. Add onions to oil only after the oil starts sizzling. Once the onions become a little brown, quickly add chopped green chili, garlic, and ginger. Make sure you remove all the stringy parts of the ginger; they don't harm, but still, why have that to get stuck in between the teeth. Fry nicely on medium heat for a while. Don't hurry otherwise the* sabzi *won't turn out right.*

After a while, add some ground jeera, dhaniya, *and* elaichi. *You can also add a little* dal chini *and* lavang. *Fry for a little while longer, until the* dal chini *and* lavang *become soft. Add tomatoes and cook until the tomato is completely squishy and the oil is leaving the sides. Then add the cut goat and nicely coat with the spices, tomato, and onion mixture. Let the goat brown a little and then you can add the chopped potatoes. The potatoes should be big in size, not little, because you want to taste them.*

Fry for a little while longer, add water to cover the goat, and then put the pressure-cooker lid on top. Cook for two whistles and then remove. Sprinkle with chopped dhaniya *on top before serving.*

INDIA	U.S.
Jeera	Cumin
Dhaniya	Coriander

Dal chini	Cinnamon
Lavang	Have to ask Avi. (67)

Saroj's one transcribed recipe tells us much about her aborted project. This recipe is situated geographically in Jorhat, in the northeastern Indian state of Assam, and historically in April 1970, just before Saroj and her husband migrated to the United States and a short five years after the Immigration Act opened the doors for migrants like the Veturis. The recipe's title, "Girija's Goat Sabzi," attributes the recipe to another woman, much to Devi's surprise. The body of the recipe itself is pedagogical in tone, with step-by-step instructions for the novice cook. We hear the cook's authoritative voice in the instruction to remove the stringy parts of the ginger, although we do not know whether this is Girija's opinion or Saroj's, as the recipe is in Saroj's handwriting. The recipe includes some pedagogy in the imperative and explanation for indicating the size of the potato pieces, while the instruction to "cook for two whistles" lies somewhere between the intuitive "cook it until it is done" and the Fanny Farmeresque precision of "cook for 30 minutes."

The final line of Saroj's sole entry into her recipe book is "Have to ask Avi"; here we see the young bride subordinating her knowledge to her husband's and not turning to her mother or her community of female peers for domestic insight. Devi has her first flash of empathy for what her mother must have gone through as a woman to whom diaspora happened, and certainly signals that the Saroj of the present, who positions herself as the all-knowing arbiter of the Stateside Indian kitchen, is a far cry from the Saroj who transcribed that recipe. What silenced Saroj? Perhaps the fact of migration

itself silenced her, as there is no model for narrating self for Saroj. Therefore, the project is initiated and then abandoned. The way Saroj has narrated herself is through cooking her "famous" dishes, which we realize may have their origins in other women's kitchens. While this may speak to the potential of collective knowledge among women in India, within the diasporic context this form of self-narration is ephemeral at best.

But the same is not true for Devi, who was born in the United States and has plenty of models from which to draw in order to narrate herself. Devi decides to write in the book: "She looked at the ornate pencil holder on her table and considered the two blue Pilot pens and one pencil carefully. Then she picked up the pencil, opened the page right after the goat curry recipe, and started writing" (67). Devi's choice of a pencil over the more permanent ink of the pens suggests that even for Devi, who has a wealth of Western resources at her disposal, the project of self-narration is shaky, easily smudged, and potentially ephemeral. The texts also draws a parallel between Saroj and Devi in that Saroj provides little to no text for her reader (Devi), while the novel itself also withholds Devi's initial writing from its reader.

The image of Devi writing her inaugural entry into the recipe book/journal immediately precedes a letter to her from her father, which brings into stark relief the highly gendered way in which the novel privileges silence and writing. Avi, unbeknownst to them, pours his feelings toward his family into letters that he writes to them but never sends. This letter is his fourth to Devi, and we learn that these letters are a coping mechanism taught to him by his Army doctor when he was recovering from having lost his arm in the 1965 Indo-Pak War. Here writing is privileged as male: Avi, a soldier, was

counseled by an Army doctor (presumably male) to journal his feelings. That Avi had access to therapy in India after losing his arm and that he is also one of the only other characters in the book that writes speaks to the gendered nature of writing and who has access to it within certain contexts. This is an opportunity provided to Devi by her therapist after her incomplete suicide, but has not been available to her mother, sister, or grandmother. Indeed, Saroj is suspicious and disdainful of therapy, holding the opinion that "talking to a shrink [is] nonsense. […] All she needed was some homemade food and Hindi movies" (47). In other words, in Saroj's eyes, all Devi needs is intensive and intimate contact with the culinary and cultural product of her parents' homeland; both of these activities require silence and, to some extent, passivity, where talking and writing are more active and productive pursuits. However, as Saroj has already put into practice and Devi will soon learn, for women outside of the gendered Western structures that formalize expression, like writing, cooking is a type of *écriture feminine* in which women can imbue food with their expressions of self and represent their social and cultural situations and contexts (Abarca 2001).

At dinner that same night, Devi makes her first foray into the kitchen and makes what she later deems "The Anti-Saroj Chutney," in angry response to her mother's insistence on making the same old "boring" food.

DEVI'S RECIPE

THE ANTI-SAROJ CHUTNEY

Day 1 after coming home from the hospital

> *The classic chutneys are coriander, mint, and chili. Everyone makes those chutneys, and oh yes, let's not forget the tamarind chutney that every Indian restaurant will serve in watery portions. But I don't want to make or eat classic chutneys.* (78)

Here Devi begins the project of generating and writing recipes in a way that we are not used to, out of anger toward her mother. Classic chutneys are representative of Saroj, against which Devi pushes. Saroj's allegiance is to India, so in rejecting Saroj and her classic chutneys, Devi also subconsciously rejects India. She also presents her recipes, starting with this one, in a nontraditional form (by Western standards); instead of measurements, there is a narrative of how she prepared the dish in question peppered with snide commentary intended to undermine and critique her mother's culinary methodology. In this recipe, we see Devi move away from every existing structure she has known, from her mother's strict adherence to her identity as an Indian to the external Western influences that exist outside the family home. Just as masalas are unique to the geographical region, the dish being prepared, and the cook preparing it, Devi localizes the cooking traditions inherited from her mother, making them her own. For Devi, the story is more important than the measurements, and the story's primacy dictates that Devi start from scratch from within the kitchen and the pages of her recipe journal. It is this starting from scratch how she finds her way back to her mother.

In her authorial hands, Devi's recipe journal moves from a translation of spice names for her mother's ease of use after migration to a translation of feelings; because she chooses not to speak in the weeks following her suicide attempt, the recipes she

concocts and the resultant dishes are the means by which Devi narrates herself: "When she was angry, the food was spicy, when she seemed happy, there was dessert, and when she looked bored, the food tasted bland" (77). For example, Devi expresses her displeasure with her grandmother via an unusual curry, "Angry at Vasu Grilled Chicken in Blueberry Curry Sauce," writing, "*In the end because G'ma wouldn't shut up about going back* [to India] *right away, I added, in anger and therefore in too much quantity: cayenne pepper. I felt the sauce needed a little bite … but I think I bit off more than the others could swallow*" (122-3). We also see a turn away from mainstream sources of food in Devi's preference for organic foods:

> *The butcher gave me three whole breasts of fresh free-range chicken. All of a sudden I have become very particular about ecological vegetables and free-range chickens. If they've petted the chicken and played with it before cutting it open for my eating pleasure, I'll be happy to purchase its body parts. Even if I have a tough time understanding this ecological nonsense, I feel better for buying carrots that were grown without chemicals, and I can't come up with a good reason to deny myself that happiness.* (123)

Devi's investment in free-range chickens and "ecological" foods is not rooted in any political or environmental concern, nor is it informed necessarily by a Slow Food ethos; rather, it is part of her process of recovering or discovering herself and what makes her happy. Just as Saroj rejects packaged and processed foods as a way to assert her Indian-ness, Devi rejects them as a way to assert her Devi-ness. Once she can articulate who she

is to herself, a process that includes finding alternatives to the industrial agricultural system, she can then undertake the process of communicating that self to her family.

Devi's project of self-narration becomes autophagous in that during her silence, she devises recipes that she prepares for and eats with her family. These recipes and the resultant dishes are expressions of who she is and what she feels; they are both consumed and recorded. She begins a cycle of becoming, embodiment (in food and text), and being consumed. It is the act of writing, of recording the recipes, which also function as narrations of self, that prevents and protects Devi from diminishment via consumption. Indeed, as the novel progresses the recipes and their embedded confessions become longer and longer; they also chart Devi's growing appreciation for her mother via the culinary idiom. For example, "Mama's Rasam with My Pastry" (179) includes a long description of having witnessed a dramatic confrontation and reconciliation between Saroj and Avi. Devi admits that she admires her mother's courage in challenging her husband in the face of their nearly broken marriage. "Maybe now Daddy will start appreciating her just as I have," she writes. Her narrative then shifts to a description of her process in making rasam, a South Indian tamarind soup. "I admire Mama's ability to whip up rasam powder without a recipe. … with Mama it's innate. … I wonder if after years of experience in the kitchen I will be as blasé about dumping spices in a pan as Mama is. I hope I will" (179). Not only is Devi starting to use, with attribution, her mother's recipes, she humbly expresses admiration for both her mother's cooking and her emotional strength.

Later, Devi attributes another recipe to her mother, "Dosa with Sambhar," and the entry begins, "Mama refused to let me make the dosas. I suggested that it would be more fun to try making savory crepes to go with the *sambhar* [vegetable stew] and pickle but she vetoed the idea" (211). Note that Devi proposes a "fun" spin on the sambhar course, and that her mother's refusal does not lead to a confrontation. This recipe appears right after Devi has successfully requested that her father put her through culinary school. Devi has realized what she wants and can now relinquish control of her mother's kitchen back to Saroj. Because the stakes have changed for Devi, the kitchen is no longer a contested space; she has used it to help her recover and define herself and then help to facilitate healing within her fractured family. Conversely, while thrust out of the protective space of the kitchen, Saroj has undergone the same process, finally able to confront her husband, articulate her unhappiness, and even propose a divorce, which prompts the aforementioned reconciliation.

It is Devi's disgust with Saroj that drives her into the kitchen; it is the pushback against Saroj that facilitates Devi's breakthrough. The mother's close affiliation with food is the mechanism by which the daughter learns to narrate herself. It is her mother's legacy.

Someone's In the Kitchen with *Ma*: Curry and Conversion in *The Hindi-Bindi Club*

Billed as "A Novel with Recipes," *The Hindi-Bindi Club*, which is firmly situated within the chick-lit genre, follows three mother-daughter dyads as they negotiate their changing identities as migrant subjects (the mothers) and first-generation adults (the

daughters), carving out a vital and vibrant cultural space for themselves from within the kitchen. Through these three mothers and their relationships with their daughters, we see Homi Bhabha's notion of hybridity in action, specifically his idea of the colonized subject as "less than one and double," which also creates a space that reveals the sociocultural and political implications of the narratives. Drawing upon the tropes of the chick-lit genre, the novel employs the reified image of the diasporic mother to translate the diasporic female experience for the western reader.

The use of the recipe as a trope both reinforces and builds upon the cultural work done by the generic conventions of chick lit: Much of the narrative of *The Hindi-Bindi Club* centers on the dissemination of recipes from mother to daughter, turning said recipes into sites of conflict and/or resolution between each mother-daughter dyad. Similarly to *Serving Crazy with Curry*, the complicated interplay of these negotiations of identity allows the novel's subjects — particularly the daughters, who must reconcile their relationships to both mother and India — to come to terms with their ethnic identities while at the same time asserting a uniquely first-generation identity that inhabits the hyphenated space signified by the term "Indian-American." Additionally, from within the circumscribed, gendered space of the diasporic Indian kitchen emerge important negotiations and representations of the female diasporic experience.

The novel's central relationship is that of Kiran Deshpande and her mother Meenal. Kiran is a doctor estranged from her parents due to their disapproval of her now-failed marriage to a white musician. Where the image of the mother in the kitchen gives the professional daughters something to resist as they negotiate their own identities as

first-generation Indian-American women, Kiran is the most legible example of this tension within the novel. While she does not necessarily reject her Indian identity, she certainly does not embrace the image of the generation she "would have been" (257) had she been raised in India and conformed to the gendered ideal of Indian womanhood, which she sees in her mother. Kiran must define herself as "not-her" (Meenal) in order to articulate her own sense of self more clearly.

The novel opens with Kiran returning home for the first time in five years in the hopes of convincing her parents to help her with a semi-arranged marriage. She does not know that in her absence, her mother has suffered from breast cancer and had a double mastectomy. Kiran has no real allegiance to India at first; in fact, she views much of her heritage (apart from the food) with disdain and, in particular, chafes against the proscribed gender roles dictated by Hindu patriarchy. Food is the placeholder of her identity, the one aspect that remains unchanging; it is through the cooking lessons her mother gives her that Kiran becomes more receptive to adopting "traditional" Indian practices into her life, such as an arranged marriage. In this way, she "eats" her identity, with her mother preparing and serving it over the course of their cooking rituals.

Commensality and food preparation are the mechanisms by which the novel reveals the fissures in familial relationships. Kiran visits her family despite their ambivalent relationship because she is hoping they will assist her in an arranged marriage, a tradition she had previously dismissed as arcane and patriarchal. Kiran's narration reveals the visceral connection between mother and daughter when Meenal, a lifelong homemaker married to a surgeon, answers the door and finds Kiran waiting:

> *Don't cry, Mom. Please don't cry.* I can't handle her tears. Never could. Growing up, the rare times I witnessed a single teardrop, I didn't even have to know the cause to blubber right there on the spot. […] She feels different somehow, I can't pinpoint why, but she smells the same. Of clove shampoo and Johnson's baby powder. Of warm cooking spices and sandalwood incense. Of *her*. Of *home*. (17-18)

Kiran's emotions are inextricably tied to her mother's; they mirror one another. Guilt, nostalgia, and the mother herself are linked via the senses to the home, suggesting Meenal's immanence and Kiran's own physical, embodied connection to her mother's psyche. For Kiran, home is a contested place, associated with dread and tension, but these sensory associations suggest that for Kiran, home was once an inviting — and unquestionably ethnically coded — space.

It is within this fraught space that Meenal embarks upon the project of teaching Kiran to cook authentic Indian food and that the pair begins to repair their relationship. The sharing and preparation of recipes also serves as a pedagogical tool for Kiran and Meenal, a function that Kiran acknowledges before setting forth learning how to make *kheer*, rice pudding: "But recipes aren't all that my mother has to impart. It hits me, the sheer magnitude of how much I don't know, how much I still have to learn, how much I can *only* learn from her and no one else. All the stories I haven't heard. The family history. The life lessons" (177). It is with this knowledge in mind that Kiran enters the space of the kitchen, a realm into which no men enter over the course of the novel; it remains circumscribed, innately female. As the mother and daughter prepare the *kheer*,

Kiran learns about the particulars of a Hindu arranged marriage (178), the story of her parents' marriage, stories of domestic violence and dowry deaths, fidelity within Hindu marriages, gender roles within "traditional" marriage, and Meenal's honest philosophy of marriage. "Kiran's Kheer" suggests that the information Kiran received over the course of the cooking session is now hers to keep and protect, to draw upon when her mother is gone.

During another cooking lesson, Meenal teaches Kiran to make chicken curry, the recipe for which she commits to paper for her daughter's reference. When Kiran assures her mother that her chicken curry is far superior to all others', Meenal's response is, "Good, then I'll leave the world at least one specialty" (21). She then goes on to tell Kiran that she has written down this recipe "*with measurements*" (21, author's emphasis) so that Kiran can use them as a resource someday. In "'Now Then — Who Said Biscuits?': The Black Woman Cook as Fetish in American Advertising, 1905-1953," Alice A. Deck explores "idealized representations of the black cook as fetishism" (70) in advertisements for flour and other baking supplies published between 1905 and 1953. She points out the tension between the white home cook and the "Mammy" figure in popular culture as it pertains to the uses of recipes in that "the Mammy's memorized recipe works only for her because she has a mystical 'way' with an oven and the white woman does not. [...] [The young white female] must find a written one that will enable her to construct a different social order in her own household with the white woman in a class by herself as a good cook superior to the black domestic servant" (84). Deck's attention to this tension between the white woman and the mammy is also relevant to

Meenal's chicken curry recipe in that the act of transcribing measurements for her first-generation daughter casts herself in the role of the ethnic female who has a "way" with the ingredients and similarly places her daughter in the role of the clueless white woman who needs a road map around the kitchen to arrive at the same dish.

Meenal's intention in transcribing her recipes is to leave something of herself behind when she passes, an act inspired by her encounter with breast cancer. She tells Kiran, "I haven't made [chicken curry] in a while, so you'll have to tell me if it's the same as you remember" (21). Anne L. Bower (1997) argues that the narrative elements found in women's published recipes in community fundraising cookbooks serve to transmit those women's values and ideals, as well as establish them as authorities and legitimize the recipe. This is certainly true in the case of Meenal's chicken curry; while this recipe does not appear in a community cookbook or circulate in any community beyond mother and daughter, the list of "Mom's Tips" certainly serves to establish Meenal's authority. The tips include a personal recommendation for a certain brand of store-bought garam masala and an edict to "never, ever, under any circumstances buy 'curry powder'" (40), which is both a prescriptive device and a cryptic commentary on colonialism. When Meenal instructs her daughter via a written recipe to never use curry powder, it is not only a resistance to the colonial forces that shaped Indian identity for generations, it is also a reference to the migrant Indian woman's duty to preserve her national identity on foreign soil, for, according to Narayan, "women of Indian origin are assigned a significant and peculiar role in maintaining expatriate Indian identity in England and other immigrant Indian communities" and that they "become, once again,

especially around issues of marriage and procreation, the imaginary of resistance to incorporation into an 'alien' culture" (10). For mothers like Meenal and Saroj, maintaining Indian identity within the diaspora requires rigorous policing of the boundaries of food and maintaining the integrity of culinary practices. Again, because masalas are unique to their region and dish, the proscription against curry powder is also a resistance to the homogenizing effects of Big Food (and of imperialism).

Even the word "curry" itself is the result of incorporation into an alien culture. Lizzie Collingham writes in *Curry: A Tale of Cooks and Conquerors*:

> No Indian, however, would have referred to his or her food as a curry. The idea of a curry is, in fact, a concept that the Europeans imposed on India's food culture. Indians referred to their different dishes by specific names and their servants would have served the British with dishes that they called, for example, rogan josh, dopiaza, or quarama. But the British lumped all these together under the heading of curry. […] As the words *karil* and *kari* were reconfigured into Portuguese and English they were transformed into "caril" and "caree" and eventually into the word curry, which the British then used as a generic term for any spicy dish with a thick sauce or gravy in every part of India. (115)

From there, the British went on to homogenize the concept of curry further by condensing the heady and pungent blend of freshly ground spice combinations into a powder to be pinched and used for "cold meat cookery," a favorite of Mrs. Beeton's; Collingham points out the irony of turning leftovers into a curry, as Hindus view the

consumption of leftovers as taboo (138). The process of assembling a unique masala — masalas vary based on the dish — is a painstaking one. While the Western home cook can take a few shortcuts (including purchasing store-bought garam masala), optimal flavor results from following the traditional steps: roasting the fresh spices, grinding them (either in a mortar and pestle or in a coffee grinder dedicated solely to spices), and adding them at a specific point in cooking in order to allow the spices to fully release their flavors. Collingham explains,

> What distinguished curries in Britain from their Anglo-Indian counterparts was their reliance on curry powder, something that no self-respecting Indian cook would have allowed in their kitchen. Indian kitchens were not properly equipped without a heavy flat grindstone on which the spices were laboriously crushed by a rolling-pin-shaped stone. The day's supply of spices was freshly ground each morning, and in wealthy households a special assistant, the masalchi, was employed to grind the spices. […] But as the Anglo-Indians began to think of curries as variations on one theme, they began to collect recipes for spice mixtures that they simply labeled "Curry Powder." By the 1850s British cookery books called for a spoonful of curry powder in most of their dishes. Sometimes they supplied recipes for curry powders that the cook could make up in advance, but as the popularity of curries became widespread it became easy to buy curry mixes. (140-141)

The gravy for Meenal's chicken curry calls for bay leaf, cinnamon stick, and whole cloves, which are fried in oil at the beginning of the preparation process. Later, coriander, cumin, turmeric, and garam masala powders are added to the sauce.[81] It is through the mingling of these distinct flavors that the cook creates something that cannot be distilled. So, to eschew curry powder is to recognize one's own separation from what was, rather than enact or participate in a further absorption or homogenization at the hands of a new alien culture. In this way, Meenal's specialty bears an embedded critique of the power structures that so shaped Indian identity, holding the demands of protecting the foodways of her homeland in tension with what is available within the diasporic context.

Meenal's best friend is Saroj Chawla, whose culinary self-narration is primarily concerned with establishing and defending the boundaries of her identity. Saroj is linked intimately with food from the moment of her introduction as a successful Indian caterer who has lost more than 50 pounds on the South Beach diet. Despite the fact that the reader never sees Saroj cooking — she hires migrant Indian women to work for her catering company — food is still the site of the struggle between herself and her American-born daughter, Preity, which is evident in the novel's introduction to Preity, as she cooks a bi-weekly Indian meal, a special treat, for her family:

> I dole out golden brown *samosas* onto four plates. I use my mom's recipe for the potato filling, minus green peas, which none of us like. For convenience, I cheat and substitute store-bought refrigerated dough for the

[81] Because they are in powder form, they are not added until late in the preparation process; should Meenal or Kiran (or the reader) decide to use the fresh forms of these spices, they would be added far earlier.

> pastry and bake instead of fry. My mom has conniptions over how I Americanize her recipes. You've never seen someone micromanage to the degree my mother does. And in the kitchen especially … "You can't call *that* a *samosa*," she says. "It's a Hot Pocket."
>
> Whatever. It's my kitchen. I can do what I want to. (57)

In Preity's household, the Indian meal every other weekend is a treat for her children, as opposed to her own childhood, when she and her brother "begged for the rare decadence of Kraft macaroni and cheese" (57). Then when Preity does capitulate to her upbringing and prepares the food from her youth, she modifies her mother's painstaking and work-intensive samosa recipe ("Saroj's Famous Samosas," 130-2) in the interest of convenience, with no small sense of defiance. To omit green peas and to Americanize Saroj's recipe so that it more closely resembles a mass-produced, highly processed foodstuff is to reject the mother and the mediations of Indian-ness she imposes upon her child.

However, this culinary conflict between Preity and Saroj is about more than just whether the food coming out of Preity's kitchen adequately performs "Indian-ness," nor does it have to do with Saroj's inadvertent contribution, via incessant exhortations to eat throughout her childhood, to Preity's descent into bulimia as an undergraduate (385-6). Indeed, it seems that Saroj is the novel's migrant mother most concerned with — or perhaps most conscious of — her Indian identity and the challenges inherent in maintaining that identity while removed from the homeland:

> At Chawla Catering, I employ mostly recent Indian immigrant women. They work for different reasons: finances, boredom, love of cooking, or the kinship of women like themselves. Where else can they make Indian cultural references and jokes? Or say, "So many flavors of yogurt!" or "SNOW!" or "*Huggies* diapers? *Chi, chi chi!*" and expect everyone to understand? Same when they lament over their children "losing their Indian-ness." I remember well my own experiences, Sandeep's and my fears of cultural dilution, our struggles to preserve our identities, values, heritage, and traditions in the American melting pot. I sympathize and share what wisdom I have accumulated in my years. (197)

She goes on to explain that today's Indian immigrants are at an advantage because members of the continent's various subcultures have the benefit of finding each other Stateside and assembling communities in their host country. Conversely, her migration with her husband from India in the 1960s (during the "brain drain" years) meant either complete isolation or forced interaction with non-Punjabis (including Americans and immigrants from other countries). This otherwise-impossible mixing of cultures serves to benefit everyone involved, she points out, especially because she and Meenal and Uma would not be the lifelong friends they are otherwise.

Saroj has also benefited financially from this situation: back in India, she would never have been able to start her own catering company, much less work for any wages outside the home. It would seem that Saroj's commitment to her identity as an Indian woman is certainly conditional; migration saved her from the fate of the "good Hindu

wife—being barefoot-and-pregnant-with-sons in the kitchen, obeying her husband and in-laws, fasting and praying for the health and long life of her husband" (202). However, when examining the emergence of the domesticity narrative in American chick lit, Caroline J. Smith points out that

> After the war's resolution, traditional family structures were re-instituted, and the predominant role encouraged of women during that time was that of ideal homemaker, epitomized by such popular culture icons as June Cleaver and Donna Reed. As historians have noted, during this time period, domesticity was marketed in ways that it had not been before through the development of household appliances and packaged and semi-prepared foods. (107)

For Saroj, products like Hot Pockets and Kraft macaroni and cheese represent a type of white Western femininity that she rejects, or at the very least, is unwilling to accept in herself or in her daughter. They fail to conform to the Indian ideal of domesticity and compromise her identity as an Indian woman, despite her simultaneous rejection of typical Indian womanhood. So, when she says she hopes to inspire the Indian workers in her kitchen (200) by setting herself forth as a model of how to transcend typical Indian womanhood while remaining somewhat true to and profiting off of the reified image — and the labor — of the Indian woman, we must question what the specific stakes are for her: What portion of her identity is *truly* at stake if she is not the "typical Indian woman"?

She gives us a clue: "In a good year, I earn almost twice [her husband's] engineering salary, and in a calculated ego-stroke early on, I hand the bulk of it over to him to manage however he wants. Because of my contributions to the family income, of all our Indian friends, we always have the biggest house, best toys, fanciest clothes, and splashiest parties" (202). So, when Saroj accuses her daughter of making samosas that more closely resemble processed junk food, widely considered to be the culinary realm of the lower class[82] than authentic Indian food, we see that Preity not only fails to perform Indian-ness correctly, but, more importantly, that she fails to perform her class position adequately. True to the tropes of the chick lit genre, earlier in the novel, Pradhan makes it clear that this is an elite economic group ("I register the B.M.W., Mercedes, Lexus, and Volvo S.U.V. parked around the cul-de-sac," 13), representative of India's "brain drain," the post-Independence era that saw upper-caste male students of medicine and engineering emigrating to America in droves, either with wives in tow (like Sandeep and Saroj) or returning briefly to India for arranged marriages, returning to their new homes with their new wives (like Yash and Meenal). However, no matter what the stakes are for Saroj, it is clear that this multifaceted filial conflict manifests itself in the discourse of class and gender roles.

Against the backdrop of Meenal and Saroj's concerns with representation, Uma Basu McGuiness undertakes the project of converting women's self-narration from being privately concealed to publicly consumed. Uma is a literature professor at Georgetown University and is ensconced in a project to recover, translate, and publish her deceased

[82] See Pollan 2007, 2008; Kingsolver 2007.

mother's journals, which are scattered all over the world in the possession of her six sisters. Of her mother's journals, Uma says, "The voice in *Ma*'s writing is her authentic one – the voice imprisoned in the body of a Bengali woman in the mid-twentieth century. The spirit I hope to set free" (138). Uma's desire to translate and publish her mother's journals speaks to the novel's overall project, which is to translate the diasporic Indian woman's experience for Euro-American readers.

Shari Benstock writes, "Chick lit's use of the diary form, journals, letters, and e-mail links it to the epistolary tradition and to the novel that emerged out of private modes of writing commonly associated with women. It also links contemporary chick lit to the novel of psychological development that emerged in the early twentieth century" (255). The recipes included in Pradhan's novel serve a similar function insofar as they speak to the characters' interiority while also commenting on the actions taking place in the rest of the novel and on India itself. Yet there are two recipes that, on their surface, present more of a quandary. "Anandita's *Alu-Phulkopir Dalna* (Potato-Cauliflower Curry)" (335-6) and "Anandita's *Shukto* (Bitter & Sweet Mixed Veggies)" (375-7) are not connected to any part of the narrative of the chapters that precede them. However, these two chapters take place in India, where Anandita, Uma's youngest sister whose epilepsy has rendered her unmarriageable, lives. Uma has returned to India as part of her project to recover and translate her mother's voice. Anandita is the unfortunate final daughter of a woman whose voice was stifled and ultimately silenced by hegemonic patriarchal cultural forces; Anandita is similarly isolated in the motherland. By juxtaposing Anandita's isolation with the women comprising the titular Hindi-Bindi Club, the text privileges the United States

as a place where such isolation does not have to exist, where women can share recipes, gossip, and complaints about culture shock, as well as collectively author a narrative of women's diaspora that renders them visible and vibrant. This privileging also speaks to the text's awareness of the opportunities it provides for readers to eat the Other, but in a way that speaks to Narayan's concern that such consumption takes into account the complexities surrounding the diasporic experience.

Beyond Mother India

Viewed together, these three texts comprise a continuum of representation that reveals the migrant mother's invisibility, clearly articulates her legacy to her first-generation children, and allows her to translate her experience to the Western reader in an attempt to connect on a human level. In each of these texts, the Indian mother evokes a structure of feeling in which she is linked via sensory language to the domestic space. She represents food, love, authenticity, home, and India itself. Her children use her monolithic role in the kitchen, that stock image of the domestic space as isolated from the ravages of the outside world and the seat of authenticity, as a springboard for their own self-discernment. The movement from *The Namesake* to *The Hindi-Bindi Club* charts an emergent self-narration for Indian women that renders them visible where they previously were not.

And yet, relying on the narrative of food to self-narrate and render migrant Indian mothers visible is fraught in that it is all too easy to fall back on the monolithic image of the ethnic mother in the kitchen. While the chick lit form enables the authors and

characters to both authorize and announce their assimilation, the reliance on this image of the mother echoes Narayan's description of the development of curry powder. Arjun Appadurai explains in *Modernity at Large* that the instability of one's identity due to migration has a positive, democratizing effect on the migrant imagination because ready access to the media allows for migrant subjects to improvise new identities. The ready availability of various cultural products means that one's identity is no longer shaped by the nation-state, but by one's circulation in what Appadurai terms "diasporic public spheres" (an idea that has its roots in Benedict Anderson's notion of imagined communities). Rather than a monolithic, unidirectional narrative of identity that emanates from the nation-state, Appadurai argues that deterritorialized subjects dwelling within these diasporic public spheres draw upon the cultural information flowing among what he terms the various "scapes" or "cascades" — comprising the ethnoscape, mediascape, technoscape, finanscape, and ideoscape — that shape the global exchange of ideas and post-migration identities. These identities are always changing based on the context of the moment. For example, Meenal concocts her chicken curry using the materials available to her upon her arrival in the United States, which then becomes that version of the dish within that particular context. Five, ten, or fifteen years later, she may have access to better ingredients thanks to a new Indian grocery down the street; therefore, the improved version of her chicken curry becomes the official version, and it does the work of representing her Indian-ness, as well as asserting her culinary authority.

Indeed, a number of critics have argued that one extension of the ethnoscape is the foodscape. In particular, David Parker, in his deconstruction of the Chinese takeaway

as a specific signifier of British food culture, remarks, "One response to the increased diversity of the ethnoscape is a broadening of the foodscape within the terms of a celebratory multiculturalism. This places different ethnic foods in a putatively non-hierarchical register of comfortably accommodated differences; an array of food choices to be gazed at, sampled, and enjoyed at leisure" (78). This positioning of ethnic foods as a novelty to be enjoyed by culinary tourists (Heldke 2001) leads to the phenomenon of hyperreal eating described by Mannur. The mediascape in the form of desi lit offers up a version of these dishes, and the consumer ingests the version of kheer or samosas that the author wants to disseminate. As a result, eventually, the samosa can eventually occupy the same imaginary space as the Hot Pocket.

Ultimately, relying on these structures can undermine the power of the representation. But I do not want to devalue the work of writing against hegemony that these texts undertake: By rejecting the homogenizing effects of Big Food and relying on the (emotionally and psychologically) local foodways of India, the mothers in these texts cultivate a diasporic cuisine that enables them to connect meaningfully with their children and to knit their migrant communities together. And many of the themes these authors work through in desi lit — generational conflicts, mother/daughter relationships, rejection of a particular way of life, empowerment — are present in very meaningful and salient ways in the novel cookbook, which suggests perhaps that the culinary idiom is a useful mechanism for narrating a broader representation of female lived experience within women's writing.

CHAPTER 4:

The Novel Cookbook: Communities, Narratives, Recipes, and Women's Literature

"It just so happens that the world is not waiting breathlessly for a three-minute way to make a four-minute egg, but sometimes, when you are a food person, the possible irrelevance of what you are doing doesn't cross your mind until it is too late." – *Heartburn*, Nora Ephron

"Your ma talks about being ready for marriage like she was dishing up a plate of enchiladas! And the worse thing is, they're completely different! You can't just switch tacos and enchiladas like that!" – *Like Water for Chocolate*, Laura Esquivel

In Nora Ephron's semi-autobiographical comic novel, *Heartburn* (1983), the narrator, cookbook author Rachel Samstat, peppers her narration with recipes, which she incorporates into the chatty patter of the story in an almost offhand manner. The end of Ephron's marriage to Watergate journalist Carl Bernstein, who had an affair with a family friend while Ephron was pregnant with the couple's second child, inspired the novel, which weaves humorous observations of bourgeois Washington life in the 1970s into the heartwrenching tale of a crumbling marriage. The recipes she includes are often related to a critical plot point, such as the key lime pie she throws in her husband's face at a dinner party or the vinaigrette recipe she withholds for fear that to share it with him will function as permission to move on to a new life with his mistress. The recipes that populate the novel are very much a part of the story being told as Rachel's narrative meanders back and forth through time. They are presented in such a way that the reader could cook them if she sees fit, but their real-life functionality is secondary to their narrative function, which is to elaborate upon Rachel's sense of self as each new crisis or memory unspools. As the first epigraph to this chapter suggests, much of Rachel's

experiences center on food, from her descriptions of food-centric vacations she and her husband took with other couples, to the potluck dishes she shares with her therapy group, to the uncomfortably racist culinary idioms she uses to describe her husband's Guatemalan therapist ("Chiquita Banana," "Guatemalan frittata," "refried taco"). At the same time, Ephron coyly references the Watergate scandal, which her ex-husband was instrumental in breaking alongside his partner, Bob Woodward, in which the actual name of the whistleblower Deep Throat — Mark Felt, who admitted his identity in 2005 — becomes the name of the philandering husband, Mark Feldman.

Six years after the publication of *Heartburn* came the novel, *Like Water for Chocolate* (1989), by Mexican writer Laura Esquivel. It tells the story of Tita, who is forced by her mother to remain a spinster while her older sister marries Pedro, Tita's first and only love. Each of the twelve chapters is named for a month, starting in January and moving successively through to December (although the narrative itself spans decades). Each chapter begins with an ingredient list for a specific dish (Christmas rolls, Ox-Tail Soup, Beans with Chile Tezcucana-style, and so on), and the instructions for preparing the dish are woven into the narrative, much like in *Heartburn*. Tita is linked to the kitchen even from within the womb, where she would cry loudly and bitterly when her mother cut onions. This somatic connection to the kitchen is mirrored by the seamless integration of the recipe into the narrative; Tita and cooking are inextricably linked, also evidenced by her ability to infuse the food she cooks with the emotions she feels while

cooking.[83] In fact, the integration of narrative with cooking, Cecelia Lawless argues, helps *Like Water for Chocolate* to function as a community, one imbued with what could be interpreted as a Slow Food ethos:

> Eating and storytelling become intertwined. In such a way, food operates on various levels and rarely ceases to act as a mode of communication, a base for community. To share a meal with someone is always more pleasant than to eat alone, and in *Like Water for Chocolate* the cooks prepare delicacies for family and social gatherings, and ultimately for the readers. […] *Like Water for Chocolate* also serves to personalize and individualize the vast repertoire of Mexican culinary dishes, as it mixes modern gustatory pleasures with a sense of specifically indigenous Mexican ingredients. (218)

What's more, Lawless argues, the inclusivity of the language of the novel's cooking instructions, the formal *se* ("one") that could mean either Tita or the reader, creates a community between reader and text, as well as provides a historical record of Mexican culinary practices (220).

By this logic, both *Heartburn* and *Like Water for Chocolate* serve as community cookbooks, wedding storytelling to cooking, facilitating women's expressions of self while also providing snapshots of profound cultural, political, and historical moments.

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[83] A recent inversion of this narrative conceit can be seen in Aimee Bender's 2010 novel, *The Particular Sadness of Lemon Cake*. In it, the protagonist, Rose, is able to taste her mother's emotions in a lemon birthday cake. Soon, she is able to taste everyone's feelings in the food that they cook, so she turns to an all-processed-food diet, in which she can only taste the chemicals and the location of the factory where the food was made.

The recipes serve, variously, to cue, amplify, enhance, underscore, or comment upon the action taking place within the novel, and the recipes are ostensibly intended for readers to replicate. Both novels feature women whose physical and emotional conditions are inextricably entwined with their relationships to food and cooking (heartburn is a common condition of late pregnancy, and Ephron uses the term interchangeably with heartbreak/ache throughout her novel; the phrase "como agua para chocolate" is a descriptor for the emotional state of extreme anger that also refers to the boiling-hot water called for in the recipe for drinking chocolate; indeed, both novels are informed by a profound sense of female anger), while also situating the narrative within a historically and culturally provocative era. Both novels embed secret knowledge or counternarratives within their pages, often via the recipes themselves. These novels-cum-community cookbooks, or novel cookbooks, are the foundational texts of a subgenre of fiction that has emerged within women's writing in the 20th and 21st centuries.

In this chapter, I argue that the *The Recipe Club* (2009), *The Way Life Should Be* (2008), and *The Icing on the Cupcake* (2010) also function as novel cookbooks. The first two novels write against hegemony by portraying the act of cooking and exchanging knowledge as creating a safe space to reveal deeply personal, secret things, from taboos to tragedies, as well as to transmit Slow Food-inspired scratch-cooking values. The transformation taking place within these spaces can be read as a form of secular transubstantiation, in which a woman turns her passion, her suffering, into something else — a recipe — that provides sanctuary and respite for the characters and affords readers a tangible connection to the text that they can, quite literally, consume. The narratives

within these two novels argue for the virtues of connection and community, values that are made visible from within the space of the kitchen. On the other hand, *The Icing on the Cupcake*, while gesturing toward the act of cooking as a way to mitigate emotional trauma, is an example of a scratch-cooking ethos deployed in the interest not of community, but of profit.

Despite the success of *Heartburn* and *Like Water for Chocolate*,[84] the novel cookbook fiction subgenre was slow to build in popularity, with the comedic generational novel *She Flew the Coop: A Novel Concerning Life, Death, Sex, and Recipes in Limoges, Louisiana* released in 1994 and the quietly popular young adult novel *World of Pies* by Karen Stolz and *Bread Alone* by Judith Ryan Hendricks in 2001. The novel cookbook started to gain traction in the mid-2000s, which saw an explosion in novels-with-recipes that included *Eat Cake* (2004); *Spooning*, a chick-lit novel that borrows Esquivel's technique of placing recipes at beginning of chapter in a twelve-month format (2006); *Pomegranate Soup* (2006) and *Rosewater and Soda Bread* (2008), about two Iranian sisters who open a Persian restaurant in a small Irish town; *Five Quarters of the Orange* (2007) by Joanne Harris, the author of *Chocolat*; *The Hindi-Bindi Club* (2007), discussed in the previous chapter; *Comfort Food* (2008) and *Knit Two* (2008), both by Kate Jacobs, feature two recipes in the novel's endmatter, but readers can get more recipes via the author's websites; *Belle in the Big Apple* (2008), about an Alabama journalist who moves to Manhattan in an attempt to spice up her career; and, most recently, *The Icing on the*

[84] Both novels were adapted into films; Ephron's book allegedly "traumatized a generation of Washington men," because "you don't want Nora Ephron calling you a jerk in one of her books because people are going to read it" (Brockes).

Cupcake (April 2010), which follows a shallow, jilted sorority girl from Dallas to New York, where she opens up a cupcake shop as part of her journey of self-discovery. The three texts I have chosen to include in this study share a common theme in that they all engage in a discourse of daughters and their mothers or grandmothers (or both).

In order to comprehend the significance of the discourse of domesticity and, more precisely, cooking in contemporary fiction, it is important to understand the cultural forces at work that have arguably contributed to this explosion in novel cookbooks. In October 2003, *New York Times Magazine* contributor Lisa Belkin posited a phenomenon called the "Opt-Out Revolution," in which educated women depart the workplace in favor of staying at home with their young children, effectively pressing "pause" on their careers. Setting the scene by evoking a bluestocking past, that of women sitting near a fireplace and discussing books, "each of them a beneficiary of all that feminists of 30-odd years ago hold dear," Belkin profiled a generation of women who registered disappointment with feminism's failure to deliver on the promise to women that they could have it all. All Princeton graduates, some hold law degrees from Harvard and Columbia, others have worked as presidential advisors, corporate CEOs, and ambassadors; all had "put on power suits and marched off to take on the world." However, Belkin's (and, by extension, her subjects') definition and interpretation of feminism and its promises are fundamentally — and fatally — flawed. She situates the feminism in question in the early 1970s and what came after, from consciousness-raising to early 1980s power feminism:

> Women — specifically, educated professional women — were supposed to achieve like men. Once the barriers came down, once the playing field was leveled, they were supposed to march toward the future and take rightful ownership of the universe, or at the very least, ownership of their half. The women's movement was largely about grabbing a fair share of power — making equal money, standing at the helm in the macho realms of business and government and law. It was about running the world. […] Time was when a woman's definition of success was said to be her apple-pie recipe. Or her husband's promotion. Or her well-turned-out children. Next, being successful required becoming a man. Remember those awful padded-shoulder suits and floppy ties? Success was about the male definition of money and power. There is nothing wrong with money or power. But they come at a high price. And lately when women talk about success they use words like satisfaction, balance and sanity.

Belkin and her sample's interpretation of second-wave feminism is based on privilege, skewed through the lens of access to an Ivy League education and the resources to acquire the totemic power suit. Yet second-wave feminism, which saw its heyday in the 1960s and 1970s, was not necessarily about achieving power; certainly there were claims to equal access to power, but it sought to clear space for women as equals via interrogating certain structures of power and oppression within the workplace, certainly, but also as regarded sexuality, reproductive rights, and women's legal rights as citizens. Communities such as the Bloodroot collective, discussed in Chapter One, grew out of

second-wave feminism. The project, then, was a far cry from seeking total world domination. For many women, access beyond the glass ceiling was and is but a distant concern, while access to childcare, fair wages, birth control, and adequate food and housing are very real issues indeed.

Despite the fact that Belkin acknowledges the rarefied air that her sample occupies, she legitimizes her concern by arguing that "these are the very women who were supposed to be the professional equals of men right now, so the fact that so many are choosing otherwise is explosive." Why it is explosive and for whom, Belkin does not say; perhaps she means that a dearth of highly placed women has a problematic trickle-down effect for less-powerful women who would benefit from sympathetic decision- and policy-makers.

The overall effect of this "revolution" is that women are able to redefine work by enacting a "hidden brain drain" that leads straight to the home (and playgroups and parks and kid-friendly coffee shops). The cause, then, is twofold: job dissatisfaction and a desire to experience motherhood more fully. Belkin questions how "the workplace has failed women," but also asserts that "women are rejecting the workplace," using motherhood as a means of departure, perhaps even an excuse. "Maternity provides an escape hatch that paternity does not. Having a baby provides a graceful and convenient exit," said one of her subjects. Belkin argues, ultimately, that women are redefining success by deploying their power to leave (because, ideally, employers will become more flexible in order to accommodate their workers who are also mothers) while

simultaneously positioning the workplace as a space that would compromise a mother's sanity.

Critics of Belkin's piece argue that, quite to the contrary, these women have not opted out, but have been driven out due to workplace inflexibility and a weak labor market following the 2001 recession.[85] Still others claim that an overzealous media eager to sustain the 1980s backlash against feminism overstated the retreat home of upper- and upper-middle-class women in the 2000s, arguing that such reporting "reinforces the stereotype that women don't have the same commitment to work that men have."[86] Regardless of whether women opted out or were forced back home, or whether the actual number of women who went home corroborates the phenomenon, the fact remains that the zeitgeist of the early 2000s reflected an exodus home by a certain type of woman, one who both cooks and reads for leisure and who, by Belkin's own admission, is "elite, successful [and] can afford real choice." And with that exodus came a new discourse of femininity and domesticity, one with which cultural critics continually contend as they attempt to situate domesticity within the discourse of "postfeminism," an ill-defined term that encompasses any cultural responses to the gaps in second-wave feminist discourse.

In their attempts to define postfeminism, these critics appear to have a common understanding of second-wave feminism's antagonistic stance toward domesticity, the consensus being that women's identities were subsumed by domesticity. The second wave's attitude toward domesticity's deleterious effects on women's identities is

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[85] See Abrams (2008), Williams (2007), and Warner (2008).
[86] See McNamara (2004).

commonly traced back to Betty Friedan's foundational text, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), in which she argued that women should find meaningful work in the public sphere in order to shape their identities, rather than buy into the myth that their life's purpose is to run a home and mother her husband and children. In their mapping of the attitudes and cultural phenomena that led up to Friedan's historic screed, Gillis and Hollows (2009) deftly trace the conjoining of femininity and domesticity back to the nineteenth century and the Industrial Revolution:

> Home and work were reimagined as distinct and separate spheres associated with specific values and functions: the private sphere was the site of home, family life and consumption and the public sphere was identified with work, industry, commerce, politics and production. […] The private sphere was imagined as feminine – the "proper" place for women – while the public sphere was imagined as masculine. (4)

As a result, women became increasingly economically dependent on men as fewer jobs were available to them. Thus a rhetoric of domesticity and maternity was borne in service to these new definitions of white, middle-class femininity. Gillis and Hollows go on to state, "the confinement of women to the home rendered them isolated, powerless and, crucially, lacking a sense of identity derived from their own labour" (6). Friedan helped to ignite the idea that for women, the only "real" identity is to be found in the public sphere. Otherwise, they risk being subsumed by domestic life, the result of which was a generation of angry responses to the expectations of women in the domestic sphere. Ironically, like Belkin, Friedan drew from a privileged sample of women, namely those

from her 1942 Smith College graduating class and relying almost solely on anecdotal evidence (acquired via a questionnaire Friedan sent to her fellow alumnae). Both women's blindness to the concerns of women outside of their socioeconomic class engendered a feminist discourse that always already excludes single women, poor women, uneducated women, some women of color, and so on. The discourse of feminist or postfeminist domesticity, then, must always (and often fails to) acknowledge the privilege at its root.

Perhaps the two most trenchant examples of the ways in which representations and discourses of domesticity are rooted in privilege are Martha Stewart and Nigella Lawson, two power players in the heyday of the 00s boom in "lifestyle porn."[87] In "Martha, Martha and Nigella," Charlotte Brunsdon reads the figures of Martha Stewart and Nigella Lawson against the strident, second-wave artist Martha Rosler. Rosler's 1975 short film, *The Semiotics of the Kitchen,* portrays the artist standing in a spare kitchen, reciting a grammar of kitchen utensils (A is for Apron, B is for Bowl, C is for Chopper,

[87] Stewart, a Barnard College-educated former model and stockbroker from middle-class New Jersey, started a catering company in the basement of her Westport, Connecticut, home in 1976. She met the publisher of the Crown Publishing Group at a party she had been hired to cater; this professional relationship led to the publication of Stewart's first cookbook, *Entertaining*. From there, she published a number of cookbooks and event-planning guides. In 1990, Stewart contracted with Time Publishing Ventures to develop the magazine *Martha Stewart Living*. Stewart's presence in various media – television, merchandising, print – led to the creation of Martha Stewart Omnimedia in October 1999, four years after *New York Magazine* declared her "the definitive American woman of our time." Stewart was convicted of insider trading in March 2004; after spending five months in federal prison, she returned to the public eye and to her entrepreneurial pursuits, starring in *The Martha Stewart Show* and publishing a wide variety of dense, domestic-themed handbooks, from "homekeeping" to baking to crafts. Lawson, on the other hand, was born to a baron and an heiress in London, England. After graduating from Oxford, Lawson embarked on a career as a journalist, reviewing books and restaurants. Her first book, *How to Eat* (1998), comprised recipes, cooking tips, and advice on efficiency in the kitchen. Lawson is noted for her purple descriptions of food, both in her cookbooks and her television shows (*Nigella Bites*, *Nigella Feasts*, *Nigella Express*) as well as for her beauty and curvy figure (described as a "sexy roundness"). Stewart and Lawson are frequently figured as transatlantic rivals.

and so on). As the recitation progresses, Rosler's delivery and movements become more violent; she stabs the table with an ice pick, then pounds it mercilessly with a tenderizer. According to Rosler, the film was meant to challenge "the familiar system of everyday kitchen meanings — the securely understood signs of domestic industry and food production." Rosler remarked about this work that, "when the woman speaks, she names her own oppression."[88] In her description of the film, Brunsdon concludes that "the semiotics of the kitchen signify containment, fury, aggression, resentment and potential revenge. […] This is a classic second-wave feminist text in its anger" (42). She then goes on to argue that the generational shift among feminists inspires what she calls a disidentification, meaning therefore, that if the second wave of feminism was ambivalent (at best) or hostile (more likely) toward domesticity, then third-wave feminism incorporates an embrace of domesticity into its ethos.

By this line of reasoning, then, Martha Stewart makes the work of leisure desirable and Nigella Lawson can ironically enact domestic multitasking like working, running a household, rearing children, and hosting dinner parties without being branded what Lawson deems a "deranged superwoman" (52). Additionally, Gillis and Hollows posit that postfeminist discourses of domesticity and femininity deploy a "rhetoric of pleasure and choice" and that "much of the recent surge of interest in marketing the domestic to the capital-possessing girl makes clear that this version of domesticity ignores the ethics of care which are bound up in the cycle of housework and domestic

[88] Rosler, Martha. *Semiotics of the Kitchen*. Electronic Arts Intermix. http://www.eai.org/title.htm?id=1545.

duty" (8). The "ethic of care" is a normative ethical theory that emphasizes relationships and interdependence. Bartky (1990) argues that because girls and women are socialized to be empathetic and caring, bound to the practice of putting others' needs before theirs, the ethic of caring therefore disempowers women. The third-wave rhetorical gesture of divorcing the ethic of care from the practice of domesticity, then, renders domesticity a uniquely individualized pursuit, which can either result in the inherently empowering practice of self-care or a detachment from any sense of community and connection.

Similarly, in pondering the ways in which second-wave feminism influences the postfeminist discourse regarding domesticity, Joanne Hollows (2006) states that

> [W]hile backlash critics condemn post-feminism through its association with domesticity, these critics use a more positive conception of post-feminism by avoiding domesticity. While we might know quite a lot about what emerges between feminism and youthful femininities, and between feminism and the single girl, what emerges between the feminist and the housewife remains largely unexplored. (104)

While it is problematic to separate the feminist and the housewife into two discrete, mutually exclusive categories, Hollows does enact an insightful reading of Lawson as an exemplar of postfeminist domesticity, "offer[ing] us the experience at the level of fantasy of what other 'retro-femininities' might feel like. […] In such a scenario, the desire to experience 'a bit of the (forbidden) other' can be a source of pleasure" (106-7). Nigella Lawson, the Domestic Goddess, effectively and pleasurably bridges the gap between the feminist and the housewife and stokes the structures of feeling that inform the

"downshifting narrative," embodied in the form, among others, of feminist academics who fantasize about "giving up their jobs to make jam"(99). "The downshifting narrative," argues Hollows, "tries to imagine something between feminism and 'traditional' femininity, it tries to imagine a solution to the problems of inhabiting contemporary femininities," which are defined by women's roles in the public sphere (111). However, these professionalized femininities that make up the genre of "chosen domesticity" are markedly classed: leaving a junior position at a top law firm in order to spend one's days preparing and serving meals of Aromatic Lamb Shank Stew along with fine wine and desserts like Slut-Red Raspberries in Chardonnay Jelly will always be more attractive than having to clean hotel toilets or wipe the bottoms of other women's children for a living. These more menial, less glamorous roles are always already meant for "working class domestic labour whose relationship to the domestic is less about choice and identity and who remain economically, culturally and socially fixed by their relationship to the domestic" (Hollows 112). The fantasy of domesticity only extends to the type of work that is pleasurable and that provides women the opportunity to express themselves creatively while also providing a thrill of guilt.

Stéphanie Genz defines postfeminist domesticity as a "postfeminist liminality informed by the inclusionary logic of both/and" (50). Second-wave feminist rhetoric has branded the housewife as the symbol of the victimizing effects of patriarchy, she argues, rendering domesticity a guilty pleasure (52). However, postfeminism effects a "chiastic reversal of the home/work dichotomy. [...] Whereas work outside the home is now an inevitable economic requirement for most women, 'homework' has become the sanctuary

of a few privileged, financially secure housewives" (54). By this logic, domesticity becomes idealized by the working woman, an escape hatch, if you will, from the pressures of work life. As it is constructed in the cultural imagination, "homework" is limited to baking cupcakes or similarly "feminine" goods; rarely do you see a woman finding sanctuary in front of a backyard grill, although it is difficult to conjure a more transgressive spin on feminine domesticity.

As this postfeminist discourse of domesticity has evolved, the cupcake has become its defining symbol, which simultaneously stands in direct opposition to and gestures to the long history of hegemonic discourse linking women to delicate, dainty, sweet foods. Shapiro writes of the "decorative, seemingly ephemeral salads were perceived as ladies' food, reflecting the image of frailty attached to the women who made them" (100). Inness notes that in early- to mid-twentieth century cookbooks encouraged girls to "think of creaminess and sweetness as feminine. […] Girls were supposed to prefer rich, sweet dishes; boys were supposed to prefer plainer recipes" (42). Yet while the third wave has appropriated this symbold of frailty as an expression of strength, Viv Groskup, in "Do good feminists bake cupcakes?" rightfully questions whether the practice of domesticity can ever be truly subversive. She also warns that a third-wave or postfeminist embrace of baking cupcakes and knitting is a dangerous practice that threatens to elide both the psychic effects of domestic drudgery on a generation of women as well as the political, educational, and economic progress that afforded younger women the luxury of participating in subversive femininity. But just as Isa Chandra Moskowitz commandeered the symbol of the cupcake and reinterpreted it to represent an

oppositional identity (that of punk veganism), ultimately, it is third-wave feminism's embrace of contradiction and of pleasure that has created a space for negotiations of domesticity as meaningful cultural practice rather than a site of oppression and resentment. Yet, for some critics, the arcane understanding of the "behind closed doors" nature of women's activities serves as sufficient justification to remove women from the equation entirely.

In "Cooked Books," Adam Gopnik undertakes an analysis of the role of recipes in literature; works by women are notably absent in this article, which underscores the general absence of women's genres as a whole among those who would undertake the project of seriously analyzing the presence of food in literature. In his *New Yorker* piece, Gopnik compellingly states that when a recipe appears in a text, the author is really serving the dish to his (and I use that pronoun deliberately) reader. He also argues that "The recipes in these books are not, of course, meant to be cooked; they have literary purposes, and one of them is to represent the background of thought. […] You cannot have characters thinking while cooking; the activity is not a place for thought but in place of thought." All of the examples he uses are by texts written by men (*Flounder* by Gunter Grass; *School Days*, a Spenser mystery by Robert B. Parker; and *Saturday* by Ian McEwan), suggesting that when male authors deploy this literary device, they fail to acknowledge that cooking and thinking are apparently mutually exclusive. They are also solitary activities undertaken in the interest of the male protagonist's pleasure. Indeed, the only female-authored novel mentioned — and only in passing — by Gopnik in his column is Ephron's *Heartburn*. For Gopnik, cooking is not a space for thought, but rather

a “chop wood, carry water” activity that does not allow for reflection on concerns other than the task at hand. The absence of female-authored novel-cookbooks in Gopnik’s piece suggests that this Zen-master approach to cooking applies only to the male cook. The absence of women in his analysis creates a lacuna in the discourse of how women’s subjectivities are figured within and during the act of cooking.

Borrowing from Lisa Heldke’s argument that cooking is, in fact, a “thoughtful practice” that bridges the gap between theory and practice (203), I argue that contrary to what Gopnik may believe, the women in my chosen texts consciously use recipes and scratch cooking as a way to practice self-care, to negotiate and communicate painful or secret feelings, to forge connections with others, and to document the foodways of their families and communities of meaning. These are novels where domesticity, particularly the work of cooking, is rendered not only meaningful, but also creates a space for counternarratives of femininity that push back against hegemony. These texts reject the expectations of career and marriage, as well as the narrative of the “good girl,” and instead depict women who write and re-write their lives from within the kitchen. They are, in effect, third-wave feminist community cookbooks that make an argument for scratch cooking as a way to recover and articulate the self. Once that work is done, the groundwork for building community is laid.

Family Connections: Cooking as Salvation, Healing, and Creating Community

Two titles from the novel cookbook genre provide strikingly clear examples of the ways in which cooking and recipes work together to enact a form of secular, literary

transubstantiation, a channeling of pain and passion into a collection of recipes. In *The Recipe Club: A Tale of Food and Friendship* (2009) by Andrea Israel and Nancy Garfinkel, two friends exchange letters and scratch recipes through the course of their teens and college years. The recipes function as a means of communication between the women, extensions of the messages transmitted within the letters. However, the recipes also serve to communicate with readers, as they appear alongside revelations of lesbianism and arrangements to obtain an illegal abortion. *The Way Life Should Be* (2007) by Christina Baker Kline features a young, single woman struggling to piece together her life after catastrophic professional and romantic disappointments. She starts teaching Southern Italian cooking classes to a group of emotionally damaged people in the small Maine town to which she has relocated. As she narrates her grandmother's orally transmitted, intuitive scratch recipes in her kitchen classroom, Angela creates a space in which the pupils feel comfortable sharing the secrets of why they are individually damaged. The result is an unlikely community of people whose lives might never have meaningfully intersected without Angela's cooking classes, which extend a grandmother's nurturance and tutelage into a space where healing happens. Within these texts, the recipe creates a familiar space for the reader to identify with deeply personal, perhaps even shameful, events in women's lives, and privileges women's narratives that are mediated by the intimate practice of scratch cooking.

The intra-textual community of *The Recipe Club* consists of its two protagonists, Valerie Rudman, a doctor, and Lillian Stone, a caterer; their community is bound together from the outset by the recipes the women exchange from their girlhood and beyond.

While *The Recipe Club* makes no explicit claims to feminism, its characters' struggles and experiences are unquestionably of feminist concern, albeit a decidedly white, middle-class feminism. By these rights, it is a community cookbook documenting a utopian community of two as they mature into adulthood against the backdrop of significant cultural change in the latter half of the 20th century in America.

The narrative is structured in three parts: a short exchange of emails that quickly grows heated set in 2000; a much longer section devoted to a near-decade exchange of letters and recipes from 1964-1973; and an omniscient narrator in 2002 that fills in the significant plot gaps and ties up the numerous loose ends created in the longer epistolary segment. The first segment introduces the titular recipe club established by the two women when they were girls; the objective of their club is simply to exchange favorite recipes with one another. The first recipes they shared were for chocolate icebox cake (21), a brownie sundae (25), "Jacques' Fancy Meatloaf" (27), and "Mommy's Macaroni and Cheese" (29). As the epistolary segment of the novel progresses, the recipes stay firmly fixed in the mundane (as opposed to particularly gourmand or haute cuisine) with chess pie (53), fish sticks, mashed potatoes, pigs in blankets, roasted chicken, and pot roast (133), among others. Rather than a coherent, thematic cookbook, *The Recipe Club* is a mishmash of varying styles: home cooking/comfort food, macrobiotics, "ethnic" and "foreign" recipes of various provenances, and desserts. Within the context of the novel, the recipes are meant to mark the passage of time by reflecting the girls' interests (desserts as children, macrobiotic foods to signal the countercultural movements of the late 60s/early 70s) and reflect the girls' feelings or experiences ("Missing You Warmly

Lentil Salad," "Lovelorn Lasagna"). This can also be seen in the logos of the recipes, which are presented in the book as realistic recipes exchanged on age-appropriate artifacts, from notebook paper with doodles during girlhood to stationery that suggests the countercultural era's fashionable paisleys, peace signs, and distinctive avocado green color palette.

Because the recipes also expand and reflect upon the narrative, they help to bring into relief the unspoken and taboo issues that women of Val and Lilly's generation faced and which later generations of women may take for granted. Not only do Lily and Val relay the intimate details of their individual sexual awakenings within their letters, but also the travails of securing an abortion and embracing alternative sexual identities, including that of Lilly's mother, Katherine. Throughout the girls' childhood exchanges, the recipes help to craft a narrative of Katherine's promiscuity via a series of "foreign" recipes passed on by her boyfriends including "Jacques' Fancy Meatloaf" (27) via Jacques from Paris, "Spicy Chicken & Rice" (54) via Jorge from Mexico, "Swedish Crescent Cookies" (96) via Dag from Sweden, and "Turkish 'Cigarettes'" (*borek*) (68) via Berk from Turkey.

Kristin Hoganson describes the fin de siècle phenomenon in which middle-class American domesticity was shaped by international forces from shopping, decorating, and cooking. Arguing that native-born white women consumed foreign goods in order to reflect their social standing and to connect themselves to imperialism, Hoganson locates iconic American domesticity within these parlors and dining rooms. "Food writings and cooking served as forms of popular geography, for they conveyed ethnographic lessons,"

she writes. "[Some lessons] stressed the foreign as a source of novelty and pleasure. […] The women who bought into the consumers' imperium sought not only tangible items but also a sense of empowerment" (10, 12). Read through this lens, Katherine's litany of culinarily inclined lovers serves as an extension of what Hoganson describes as a "consumers' imperium," an "imperial system of consumption" that reaches both into the bedroom and the kitchen. Throughout the novel, Katherine is figured as a free spirit, famous for her work on Broadway (it is unclear as to what her actual occupation is), and she fancies herself above the mundane world of monogamy. In the process of transcending these pedestrian concerns, she undertakes the project of "consuming" foreign men in search of novelty, pleasure, and freedom from the constraints of marriage. The recipes are material representations of the men she has consumed as well as of their respective cultures — the ethnographic lessons — even though they call for nothing more exotic or fancy than Worcestershire sauce or phyllo dough (the ready availability of which in 1960s New York is questionable). The domesticated nature of the recipes tames the salacious means by which they were obtained, as well as neutralizing the threat of foreign sexual menace, especially in the personae of Jorge from Mexico and Berk from Turkey.

Katherine's cosmopolitan taste in lovers sets up a legacy for the two young women, serving as a bellwether for their individual sexual experiences: her daughter Lilly is similarly adventurous and worldly, while Val is much slower to blossom. However, the novel refuses to judge or censure any of the women's choices and experiences: they are all valid, even in crisis. In a short, panicked letter, Val, the less sexually experienced of

the two young women, reveals that she has become pregnant after losing her virginity to her boyfriend, a fellow medical student:

> I know you said you'd do everything in the world to help me, but what does that actually mean? It's not like you know this person. Are you sure he's a real doctor? What if he's just some maniac? Do you realize I could bleed to death from some filthy coat hanger? I keep picturing myself dying on some stained mattress on a tenement floor. And all because I had sex. Which, by the way, I obviously couldn't even do correctly – I mean, who gets pregnant after the first time? (246)

As Val is a medical student, she is presumably aware that it is indeed possible to get pregnant the first time one has sex; her naïveté regarding this matter simply serves to underscore her character's trusting and optimistic approach to life itself and her (at times emotionally abusive) relationship with Lilly. Of particular note, though, is her attitude about the consequences of sexual activity outside of marriage: to her mind, the punishment for sex (that results in pregnancy, especially) outside of marriage is death. Val's fear and self-reproach can certainly be read as a distortion or amplification of the conservative attitude toward abortion — and, more broadly, female sexuality — and engendered by post-World War II domestic rhetoric, despite the fact that fewer than 100 women died as a direct result of abortion (legal and otherwise) in 1972.[89] Additionally, the date of Val's letter, October 29, 1972, has profound, somewhat poignant resonance,

[89] According to the Centers for Disease Control's 1999 Abortion Surveillance Report, "in 1972, 24 women died from causes known to be associated with legal abortions and 39 died as a result of known illegal abortions."

as Roe v. Wade, which forbade states to outlaw first-trimester abortions, had just been re-argued in front of the Supreme Court (October 11, 1972). The Court issued its decision, one considered a watershed moment for women's reproductive rights, on January 22, 1973. Even more poignant is that the state of New York legalized abortion up to 24 weeks in 1970, so it is unclear as to why Val would seek an underground abortion at the hands of a potential "maniac" two years after the decriminalization of pre-quickening terminations.

Lilly's reply, in which she provides Val the instructions to obtain her procedure, speaks to the subaltern nature of abortion, pre- (and, to some extent, post-) legalization:

> Don't blame yourself or you'll never enjoy sex again. It's really just one of those shitty things. […] Cloud will take us to the doctor. She had the same procedure done by him two years ago when she was still dating men (long story…). She said he is extremely gentle. He has an office in Chinatown. He doesn't speak lots of English, but Cloud knows some Mandarin. It costs $250. If you want, I can loan it to you. […] When this is over, and well behind you, we damn well better march on Washington about women's rights. Cloud is hopeful there will soon be an enlightened Congress and we'll see some legislation. (247-8)

Lilly's letter serves two functions. First, as the more sexually experienced woman, she places importance not on Val's mental or physical well-being, but on her future ability to enjoy sex, which positions her as a precursor of the sex-positive feminism of the third wave. Second, her mention of Congress and legislation speaks to the political

implications of abortion, humanizing those who undergo the procedure and underscores their positions as women and citizens, rather than as merely anonymous consumers. Her jaded tone positions her as one who would welcome Val to the sisterhood of women who transgress gender norms and traffic in taboo behavior. In fact, in her note to Val, Lilly gestures to her own transgressive acts by mentioning Cloud, the abortion veteran who no longer dates men.

Neither of the letters that the women exchange before Val's abortion have recipes attached to them, which speaks to the absolute urgency of the matter and speaks to the limitations of the recipe in its ability to expand upon Val and Lilly's emotional states. There is no recipe that can express the depth of Val's anguish, nor is there one that can express the kind of reassurance and support Lilly aims to project in her reply. The recipe that follows the abortion, however, comes attached to Val's note of effusive thanks for Lilly's support. In it she confesses that she is haunted by the abortion, wondering, "Who would he have been? What might she have given to the world? What kind of mother would I have been? What kind of love might I have offered that child … and what would I have received in return?" (249). The recipe that follows is for Apple and Pear Friendship Fool; Val writes, "The friendship part is in honor of you – the fool part is in honor of me!" (250). Again, there is no recipe to express the loss Val feels, but she is able to express the depth of her love for and gratitude to Lilly via both letter and recipe. Even within this context, some things remain unsaid, unexpressable, and therefore unconsumable.

The same cannot be said of Lilly. A few letters later, she mentions that Cloud is "really opening [her] eyes to lots of stuff" (252), including women's retreats in Massachusetts and a campus consciousness-raising group, and shares a recipe for Cloud Nine Stuffed Peppers, adding, "one bite and you're on cloud nine!" This pairing of a recipe bearing Cloud's name and the invocation of ecstasy upon consuming said recipe suggests that something more than friendship is brewing between Lilly and Cloud; grouping it with feminist activities like women's retreats and consciousness-raising groups lends lesbianism a decidedly political slant and perhaps even suggests that lesbianism is inherently feminist.

Lilly does eventually reveal to Val that she and Cloud are lovers, and attributes it to Cupid's Chocolate Cake (265), which "put love back into [Lilly's] life" (264). She writes, "It's not like I'm done with men. It's just a relief to be with someone who finds her way around my body without me having to give her a road map. And there's a closeness that isn't about the sex. Strange for me to say, but that might be the most appealing part" (264). In this confession is a tacit acknowledgement that this relationship is likely temporary, a respite from the (clichéd) frustrations of dating men. And while she does not expand upon this remarkable closeness that transcends sexual intimacy, Lilly does gesture toward a deep identification among women that is perhaps impossible to articulate but reinforces *The Recipe Club*'s tertiary (but troubled) feminist project in

stressing the importance of the various bonds between women, again freed from the interventions of corporate food, as rendered via the string of mostly scratch recipes.[90]

Lilly's written coming out to Val comes at a watershed moment in the gay rights movement; she writes of her awakening in early 1973, nearly four years after the Stonewall raid (and the violent riots that followed) and three years after the first Gay Pride parade in New York. In fact, 1973 is the year that homosexuality was removed from the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* as a sociopathic personality disorder. While Lilly does not document or communicate any participation in Gay Pride events or any other gay rights-related activism, the subsequent discussion between she and Val and the latter's discomfort with ("I'm a hypocrite, a bad friend, a parlor liberal," 266) — but ultimately uneasy acceptance of — her friend's sexuality again privileges deep identification among women while also presenting "alternative" sexualities without judgment. Indeed, even Cloud, who after ushering Lilly into the world ultimately betrays the bonds of sisterhood, possesses a complex relationship to her own sense of femininity.

Cloud eventually drifts out of Lilly's life, leaving her for another woman. While she may seem, on the surface, a caricature of a particular type of woman associated with the 1960s/70s countercultural movement with her progressive sexuality, preference for macrobiotic food, a dilettante's cursory knowledge of Mandarin, and history of abortion, it is possible to read her as possibly the most transgressive figure in the novel. In the first

[90] A few of the early recipes in the book call for packaged or processed ingredients, such as Bisquick or chocolate syrup.

section of the novel, Lilly reveals to Val that Cloud's real name was Jane Smith (33), a name that is often used as a pseudonym or for otherwise unidentified women and evokes an institutionalized discourse of white femininity. While Cloud may seem like a flaky peacenik, the fact that she renames herself after an ephemeral celestial being as part of her process of self-actualization might actually suggest that she possesses some small degree of self-awareness. She is a creature in motion, in search of herself and unafraid to subvert the cultural and gendered expectations of her, which are encapsulated in her given name. She is even willing to sacrifice the feminist/lesbian sisterhood she cultivates with Lilly as part of the project of asserting her personhood.

With Katherine and Cloud serving as extreme examples of women crafting their own recipes for living, what emerges in the middle is a quiet, impenetrable bond between Val and Lilly (who, it is revealed late in the novel, are half-sisters, the result of an affair between Val's mother and Lilly's father). That bond is tested in a thousand different ways but also strengthened not only by the discovery of their filial relationship, but also through the legacy of exchange sustained over their lives. The recipes that serve to amplify their expressions of love, loyalty, betrayal, forgiveness, remorse, heartbreak, and joy are the connective tissue between the women, material reminders of their entertwined lives. At the end of the novel, Lilly marries Val's cousin, Ben, with whom the girls grew up after his parents were killed in a car accident. Val and Lilly cater the wedding, the menu comprising a broad representation of the recipes the two exchanged in their youth. The affirmation of family bonds, both through blood and by marriage, is cemented by their consumption of these foods, a ritual as binding as the exchange of vows.

And yet, despite the emphasis on this lifelong connection between Val and Lilly and the use of food to mediate it, there are several problematic recipes that are either anachronistic in their ingredients lists or are not consistent with the character offering them. For example, many of the recipes — Green Salad with Giant Croutons and Nuts (99), Bitter Greens with Sour Lemon (181), Wild Girl Wild Mushroom Salad (241), Inner-Peace Brown Rice and Cashews (268), Rave-Reviews Ravioli (274), Missing You Warmly Lentil Salad (282), and Forgiveness Tapenade (296) — call for extra-virgin olive oil, when it was not in wide use in the United States until the 1980s (Kamp, Hazan). FitzMitchell's Shortbread (157) comes from a bakery in Cambridge, England, where it was procured by the free-spirited, artistic Lilly on a summer trip in the late 1960s, but is given in standard measurement: Even today, most British recipes are written in metric. By this point in the novel it is explicit that Lilly lacks proficiency in math; the likelihood that she could have converted a bulk commercial recipe from metric to standard is low. Conversely, Val, who used doubling and tripling recipes as a way to practice multiplication, division, and fractions, is able to convert a recipe for fish sticks served at her summer camp from one that serves 400 to one that serves four. Earth Day Yogurt (177), exchanged between the girls in 1970, calls for full-fat yogurt, although at that time, fat-free yogurt (nor the obsession with fat-free foods) was not common; in 1970, a recipe would likely have called simply for yogurt. If the recipes are supposed to contribute to the narrative by serving to reflect the historical moment of the novel's characters, would there not be a bit more verisimilitude between the narrative and the recipes? These slippages and anachronistic ingredients represent the colonizing effect of corporate and

convenience foods informed by the authors' contemporary situatedness, in that mass-produced olive oils and fat-free yogurts are part of the American culinary consciousness. This colonization suggests that the recipes privilege the connection of the text with the readers, rather than the connection between the characters. It is clear that the recipes were written for the readers' use, not the characters', which reduces the recipes' meaning to mere commodities and ultimately cheapens the stories of the novel's utopian community of two.

How then does a novel cookbook effectively weave together storytelling with cooking in a way that communicates self-care and self-expression while also rendering visible a community of meaning? The answer may be in Slow Food and the way its ethos works its way into the culinary discourse of *The Way Life Should Be*. The novel tells the story of Angela, an event planner from New Jersey who, feeling bored by her life, initiates an online romance with a sailing instructor from Maine. When her career suffers from an unexpected and total flameout, Angela decides to move temporarily to Maine to explore her nascent relationship with the sailor, against the protestations of her friends and family. Despite the fact that the novel starts off as a romance plot, the romance fails immediately upon Angela's arrival in Maine. Left without options and driven by a desire to stay in Maine, which she has romanticized from her Manhattan cubicle, Angela decides to stay on the island to which she has traveled; it is at this point that the story emerges as a community cookbook. The failed romance provides the rupture for the narrative's actual trajectory, in that Angela turns to cooking, both privately and publicly, to negotiate her new circumstances and reassemble her sense of self in the wake of the

collapse of her life, at the same time documenting her grandmother's Southern Italian culinary practices. While she initially turns to cooking in order to nurture herself through her crisis, Angela eventually directs that nurturing outward via her cooking classes, which become a space of intimate sharing and healing for the participants, who form an unlikely community.

In the process of this narrative, the text itself performs a critique of the practice of cooking with recipes, suggesting that to do so is somehow inadequate or inauthentic, in that the best cooking is led by the senses and intuition; yet, in doing so, the text contradicts itself by virtue of the fact that the latter third of the novel includes recipes and includes a collection of recipes mentioned in the novel as part of the back matter. What is the effect of this text that is at odds with itself as regards the use of recipes? On the one hand, it privileges cooking via somatic knowledge that is not simply acquired but is absorbed so completely as to be utterly embodied, but acknowledges that not everyone has *il regalo* ("the gift") – the ultimate scratch cooking skill; on the other hand, to provide recipes enables the reader to participate in Angela's story, inviting them to join her community of cooking-class students by recreating the dishes she teaches.

The text privileges cooking without recipes via the figure of Angela's paternal grandmother, Nonna, who emigrated from Italy in the middle of the 20th century and taught Angela everything she knows about Italian cooking (within the world of this novel, there is no food but Italian food). Nonna, who is beloved by Angela, "cooks by feel, by touch and taste and sight" (3). For Nonna, cooking is intuitive, a cellular knowledge; such a skill set also figures her as the idealized ethnic mother figure, innately

connected to the senses and the earth and laboring in the kitchen that has been familiarized within the cultural imagination (see Williams-Forson, Blend, Deck).

Nonna also turns her idealized kitchen into a classroom, providing Angela with culinary tutelage throughout her girlhood: "And with each turn she makes she is teaching. *Here is how you cut a potato, slicing it just so and slipping it into a pot of cold water to stop it from turning brown. You carve a tomato perpendicular to the stem. Sprinkle sea salt over cut eggplant in a sieve to drain the bitterness out*" (51). Here we see that somatic knowledge within a pedagogical context, made possible because Angela has *il regalo*, although it is unclear as to what exactly defines having a gift in the kitchen within this context. Is it the ability to listen and follow directions or is it a genetic inheritance? Whatever the nature of this gift, Nonna knows all the secrets of the Southern Italian kitchen and is able to transmit them to her granddaughter. As the narrative progresses, we see that, just as Saroj Veturi in *Serving Crazy with Curry*, Nonna helped to write the first pages of Angela's community cookbook without ever putting pen to paper.

Because of Nonna's tutelage and Angela's possession of *il regalo*, Angela is able to begin the reconstruction of her life in Maine first by making Nonna's stone soup to console herself in the ramshackle cottage she secures as a winter rental, then by engaging in a "campaign of culinary seduction" (125) to entice Flynn, the gay Australian owner of the coffee shop where Angela finds part-time work, to replace the stale bagels in his deli case with her homemade soups and pastries. As she cooks a prototype soup with which to "seduce" Flynn, she hears Nonna's voice explaining "how to caramelize garlic in a saucepan, cooking it in olive oil on low heat for forty minutes or so, until golden brown

and velvet to the touch" (125). This is one of many moments in which the text extends Nonna's pedagogy to the audience. It is also important to note that Angela's "culinary seduction" is in the interest of a nascent urge to professionalize her hobby, not in the interest of bedding Flynn, even though this successful "campaign of culinary seduction" is a play on the adage that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach. In her analysis of Peg Bracken's *I Hate to Cook Book* and its rebellion against hegemonic expectations of women's kitchen output, Sherrie Inness notes that

> One of the reasons that many hated to cook was that their work was seldom appreciated by family members, who seemed to feel that mother's role in life was to set heaping plates of food in front of them, which they could poke at, give her a look as if she were attempting to poison them, and comment, "What is this? Is it edible? Is it food?" […] Another media stereotype Bracken questioned was the one that linked a woman's sexual appeal to her cooking skills. Today the idea endures that a woman needs to be a good cook to attract a mate although he does not have the same worry. (74, 76)

Perhaps the reason so many women long to monetize their culinary labor is the desire for quantifiable results and positive feedback in the form of sales, and Angela's project is a means by which she can recover from the disappointing love affair with the sailboat instructor who enticed her to Maine. Ultimately, the end goal of Angela's campaign is not heterosexual romance, but a mutually beneficial business partnership. Angela transgresses the gendered, heteronormative dimensions of the adage, which has romantic

love at its foundation but implies a sort of coercion or manipulation through the preparation of special dish as a means to put the preparer's agenda over on an unsuspecting recipient. By removing romantic sex and love from an attempt at seduction, Angela reframes the terms of culinary exchange between woman and man in order to both monetize her cooking skills and as part of her process of self-reinvention.

Indeed, Flynn agrees, albeit reluctantly, to carry a rotating menu of soups and pastries — including Nonna's banana bread — at the coffee shop; the offerings are instantly popular and also inspire a cosmetic makeover of the formerly spare and uninviting shop. Flynn is so taken with Angela's cooking that he urges her to take her emergent business a step further by offering cooking classes to the locals, also stating that such a plan might help her make some friends and help him to find a boyfriend; Flynn has seduction on his mind, but needs Angela to provide the opportunity and the tools (i.e., cooking skills) with which to find his way to a man's heart. She is reluctant to pursue this avenue due to the space restrictions in her rented cottage and her perceived lack of interested parties. Yet Flynn, who was unable to help himself out of the inertia of serving stale bagels in his coffee shop, persists, even going so far as to draw up and post a flier in the shop — without Angela's prior knowledge or consent — that reads:

Cooking classes in Dory Cove – a dinner party a week!

(Southern Italian with an American accent)

4 Wednesdays starting November 29

6-9:30pm

$15 each class

Bring a bottle of any kind.

Sign up below or see Angela at the Daily Grind.

(Ask for directions) (151)

Flynn, the Australian who stands out in small-town Maine in part because of his "foreign" accent, draws attention to Angela's own American accent, signaling to potential cooking students that she will be offering an American interpretation of Southern Italian cuisine. What this signals to readers, though, is that "Southern Italian with an American accent" means something entirely different; I will also argue that the cooking class may serve as an advertisement within the world of the novel, but functions as an invitation for the reader to become one of Angela (and Nonna's) students as well.

As Angela prepares to teach her first class, she reflects upon her tutelage under Nonna, recalling that one of the first dishes she mastered in Nonna's kitchen was chicken marsala, but only after frustrating her seasoned grandmother by "always spilling milk or sneezing into the sifter," inspiring Nonna to berate her as *la ragazza sciocca*, a silly girl (157). Of course, Angela's gift prevailed, which is how she finds herself in the grocery store, fretting over the lack of appropriate ingredients and hearing Nonna's voice in her head reassuring her that, "you find fresh, you have your dinner" (158), a distinctly Slow Food tenet. Angela's years as Nonna's protégée equip her with the confidence to retool her menu based on what the poorly stocked supermarket has to offer and, as to serve as Nonna's stand-in within a kitchen-as-classroom context. Not only does Angela teach Nonna's recipes, she assumes the role of Nonna herself, telling stories about how she "grew up peeling potatoes and kneading dough in [Nonna's] kitchen while she told

stories from her past, from Italy" (163), while "teaching" (rubbing a garlic clove between her palms to remove the husk, passing around a tomato) her eager new students (164). It would seem that within this context, "Southern Italian with an American accent" refers not to the interpretation of the cuisine, nor to her use of the Italian names for the salamis and peppers on the antipasto platter, but to the fact that Angela is effectively Nonna's stand-in, an American-born woman with an American accent transmitting Nonna's knowledge — mediating and preserving Nonna's idealized life in provincial Southern Italy — to those who were not endowed with *il regalo* for the *cucina povera* of Basilicata.

The students' lack of Angela's gift extends to their discomfort with the lack of recipes. "You said your grandma doesn't use recipes, but I wish you would," says Eileen the librarian. "I'm a methodical person. I like to know what I'm doing every step of the way" (165). The novice cook feels the need for a measure of control as she navigates the new cuisine, as opposed to the lifetime of knowledge that becomes intuitive and somatic for Nonna and Angela. While this method of oral exchange has suited the relatives for many years, Eileen and her cohort require a hard copy of the recipes, which make this inherited knowledge material in a more permanent way than does a home-cooked dish of chicken marsala. While this exchange aids in the development of the fledgling community being built on Mount Desert Island (where, incidentally, Martha Stewart has a home), it also constitutes a loss of the intimacy and pleasure experienced between Nonna and Angela in the kitchen, which Angela attempts to recreate in her cooking classes.

The intimate, informal exchange of knowledge favored by Angela and Nonna can be seen in the depiction of the farmers' market, which is figured as an idealized space. This privileging of the direct connection, eliminating corporate or retail middlemen, can be related to Angela's relationship to the recipe: the recipe is an unwelcome middleman where direct exchange in the form of oral transmission is clearly the preferred medium. Similarly, the supplies Angela sources for her first meal from the supermarket are not up to scratch; when she mentions this to one of her students (and potential love interest), he invites her to visit the local farmers' market with him. She accepts, and her description of the market upon her arrival is a catalogue of locally sourced delights:

> I find instead a vibrant emporium with twenty-odd vendors selling everything from organic spinach and baby lettuce to free-range eggs and chickens, honey and maple syrup, dried blueberries and cranberries. As I wander up and down the aisles, passing stalls with low-fat granola and whole-milk yogurt, goat's milk cheeses and roasted soybeans, I chat with farmers and examine the produce. (187)

Within the space of the farmers' market, Angela is able to connect with the growers and producers, staying close to the source of the goods for sale, thereby rendering the supermarket an inappropriate middleman between the cook and her ingredients. For Angela, a direct relationship with the farmers and other producers is a more appropriate form of exchange in that it evokes Nonna's edict to "find fresh"; that this relationship takes place on a remote island at the periphery of the continent speaks to the text's

rhetorical, and Angela's physical, move away from the corporate work- and marketplace. Here the text lays bare its Slow Food ethos. Richard Wilk writes,

> While business seeks to turn food into a substitutable generic commodity, people as consumers constantly find ways to *decommodify* food, to make it personal, meaningful, cultural, and social. Family recipes and local food traditions can be seen as archetypal examples of […] *inalienable wealth*, property so thoroughly decommodified that it cannot be bought or sold, only gifted in ways that maintain its social identity and meaning. The very point of many food consumption rituals, from family meals to ceremonial feasts, is to transform sometimes anonymous raw materials into meaningful social relations. (20)

At $15 a class, Angela is not going to turn a profit on her Italian-food cooking series, much less make a living. In fact, she frets as she shops at the grocery store that she is operating at a loss, spending $104 on materials when she only has five students. While she is silent on the matter of cost when she begins to shop for class materials at the farmers' market, her enumeration of her purchases suggests another deficit: "asparagus, Parma ham, eggplant, eggs, parsley, ricotta and Parmigiana, hearty tomatoes […] all that's left is to pick up clams and mussels, ocean fresh, at the harbor in the morning," (187-8). The difference, of course, is that the act of speaking with the purveyors of the goods in question has rendered them priceless, particularly since they are being deployed in the interest of sharing *il regalo*. The fact that Angela seems unconcerned about the price of the farmers' market goods indicates that something as crass as money is of no

concern when she has Nonna's recipes, fresh and local ingredients procured correctly, and new friends with which to share them.

We also see here Angela adapting the foodways of her grandmother to the ingredients that are local to her in Maine. As with Ashima Ganguly's approximations of the food of her homeland, Angela uses what is available to her in the interest of producing a fresh meal with "local" ties to Italy. In his argument in support of Slow Food (or what he calls "food at moderate speeds"), Sidney Mintz writes,

> Local or regional cuisine implies access to particular food resources, linked to specific local conditions. In turn, those resources imply seasons, the year's round; customs within local culture that form part of the structure of eating habits; and locally distinctive food processing and cooking techniques. […] It is not surprising that in this era of rapid change, local people have sometimes chosen the immediately apparent benefits of modernization, unaware that among those features of their lives that they would eventually give up in exchange were such things as the smell of fresh-baked bread, the flavor of freshly picked berries, the taste of homemade pickles, and the sense of satisfaction to be found in one's own competence. (6)

This marriage of pleasure in food with eating locally and in season, as well as with discovering new culinary skills and abilities is the very epitome of Angela's project. As Angela discovers her own competence as a cooking teacher, her students discover their own competency in cooking. Angela's choice of ingredients, from hand-selected

asparagus to ocean-fresh mussels also serves to help awaken her students to a culinary world beyond the stale, mass-produced bagels Flynn used to stock in his coffeeshop.

The novel begins to replicate Nonna's act of oral transmission of recipes as the cooking classes progress, which also functions as the moment when the novel invites the reader into its community. Just as the movement Lawless describes in *Like Water for Chocolate*, for two paragraphs in particular, the novel blurs the boundary between cookbook and fiction. At the beginning of her second cooking class, Angela explains to her students how to make chicken stock for soup, but the paragraph in which she does so shifts in voice from first- to second person imperative:

> To make soup stock, I explain, you begin with the parts of a chicken you can't or won't use, the parts you would otherwise discard: backs, necks, skin, wings, innards. Buy whole chickens, and when you cut them up, save and freeze these parts. When you are ready to make stock, simply thaw and place them in a large heavy pot with a lid. Add any sturdy vegetables you have lying around – carrots, onion, garlic, celery – and a bay leaf or two. Sprinkle generously with sea salt and peppercorns, add water to cover, and then bring to a boil and simmer for several hours or longer – all day, if you can. Strain well with a fine sieve. Let cool, skim the fat off the top, and strain. (191)

This narrative voice goes on to explain the various uses of chicken stock for Italian soups, such as *zuppa di legume*, *minestra*, and pasta *fagioli*, peppering this catalogue with ingredients and instructions. The text then shifts back to first-person narration, and

Angela launches into another of her "granny stories," telling her students that the smell of *stracciatella* awakens a primal memory for her, "sifted from [her] grandmother's stories of her village in Italy. […] I can smell the broth, the sea, the scent of her own long hair, swaying to her waist" (192). When Eileen invariably asks for exact measurements, Angela is prepared with a printed recipe; it is the first recipe presented in standard recipe form included in the text. This movement from cookbook-style narrative pedagogy to a "granny story" tinged with primal memory, to the rupture presented by the recipe for *Stracciatella alla Romana* effectively extends the cooking class out toward the reader, who gets the benefit of the teaching, the granny story, and the recipe. In this way, the text makes Angela and Nonna's collective pedagogy available to the reader, effectively drawing her into the site of the cooking class and making her one of the students.

Later, Angela tries to pass on the secrets of her gift to her students, pushing back against their urges as neophytes to possess the material object of the recipe. After narrating and demonstrating a recipe for butternut squash soup to the class, Eileen asks, "Do you have a recipe?" Angela's reply is, "That was the recipe." She explains to the class, "so much of this kind of cooking is about learning to trust yourself, developing an intuitive understanding of how flavors and textures work together" (203). Strangely, such an idea does not give Angela pause, as so much of her story to this point, including striking out on her own in a strange state, living alone in a rickety shack on a remote road, teaching cooking classes — essentially, departing from the "recipe" that serves as the script for American middle-class life — has been about Angela learning to trust herself while she "cooks" her life. Her comment to Eileen about learning to ascertain the

flavors and textures of various ingredients and dishes is, effectively, a metaphor for Angela's own journey, for which there can be no material script. There can only be trust in oneself and, to an extent, one's community.

And this kind of cooking does engender trust among the student-cooks and their teacher, as Flynn suggests that each student share a previously unknown tidbit about themselves with the class. He starts with a relatively innocuous "secret": that he doesn't know how to swim. His ex-boyfriend, who is also in the class, reveals that he was once a Chippendale's dancer. These two men share benign pieces of information about themselves, while the third man in the class, Tom, does not share a secret at all; the aggregate effect of the men's sharing is one of amusement and titillation. At the next meeting of the cooking class, however, the mood shifts. Eileen, the town librarian who has taken such a keen interest in Angela's library habits as to border on invading her privacy, reveals that right before she moved to Mount Desert Island, she had completed a seven-year manslaughter sentence for killing her physically abusive husband. She states her desire for a clean slate, to go where no one knew her, as her reason for moving to the island, despite the isolation her self-imposed exile has caused: "It's been hard, not having anybody I could talk to about my life. It's felt so lonely. I wasn't sure about this, but it's a relief to talk about it now" (217). And, rather than reject or censure Eileen, the rest of the cohort raise their glasses and drink a toast to her.

Seizing the confessional moment, Rebecca, the enigmatic yet friendly single mother whose well-appointed home in which the cooking classes take place, reveals that the reason she and her young son had moved to Mount Desert Island from Manhattan was

that her husband had been killed in the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. She then goes on to reveal that she and her husband had had a fight on the tragic morning and that she had been feeling unsatisfied in their marriage. She explains, "I don't really talk about it because – that's part of why I came here, to get away from having to talk about it" (218). She expresses doubts as to whether her marriage would have survived had John not died in the attack. The group is stunned and silent as they reflect on the enormity of Rebecca's revelation; the effect is one of forging the bonds of friendship and community among them, which strikes Angela as oddly spiritual:

> Taking a bite of biscotti, a sip of wine, I am reminded of the rituals of worship, of strangers gathered in reflection. […] I think of confessions, the words of penance and solace. Something akin to that feeling, a feeling I've never had anywhere else, is what I'm experiencing now. Perhaps it is simply this: the bread, the wine, the Hanukkah candles; community and ritual. A sharing of experience, of stories, the facts of each person's life distinct and yet inseparable from the whole. […] These are the chronicles of legend, the tales we tell over and over, the stories that remind us we are not alone. (220-1)

These cooking classes, the primary purpose of which is to exchange recipes and expert knowledge for $15 and a bottle of wine a night, become a sacred place where Rebecca and Eileen feel safe to reveal the things that women cannot or will not talk about, and where Angela senses the bonds of community being forged in a secular rite; the recipes within this section of the novel serve as the host with which the reader can partake. That

the women's confessions outstrip the men's in their gravity suggests that the safe space created within these classes is inherently — and perhaps even necessarily — gendered. Indeed, the text has claimed the kitchen as a site for women within which such enormous secrets can be safely revealed, even — or perhaps especially — for Nonna herself.

Late in the novel, Nonna suffers a stroke, which necessitates Angela's return home to New Jersey. During her recovery, Nonna confesses to Angela that as a teenager back in Italy, she had become pregnant as a result of an affair with a priest. The priest left town, she lost the baby, and she married a man she did not love and who brought her to America. This scene takes place as the two women prepare meatballs for Christmas dinner: This device of revealing secrets or other intimate information between a mother and daughter (or some comparable filial relationship) is one that is replayed often in migrant/disaporic literatures, as discussed in Chapter Three. Nonna tells Angela that she deeply regrets having left behind her home and family in the interest of escaping her heartbreak and lingering longing, that she should have followed her heart rather than her head in her choices (255). Again we see an exchange of both culinary and personal information – Angela watches Nonna as she expertly prepares the meatballs and also confesses a deeply transgressive moment from Nonna's past. "No one knows. No one but you," Nonna tells Angela (255). Nonna does not feel shame about having had an affair with a priest or having married a man she did not love as a means of escaping heartache; her regret stems from having forfeited her family and homeland. In this moment, Angela's role as her grandmother's interlocutor has deepened, the stakes of their exchange have intensified, and the parallels between the kitchen and the confessional are

brought into relief: Rather than encountering salvation in the house of God, women find it in the house; they are able to save themselves via the act of cooking and sharing. In a culture that would marginalize and silence women, here is an example of a female counternarrative presented and received without judgment. The text does not judge or condemn Nonna for her mortal sin; rather, she is merely a cautionary tale for Angela not to repeat the same mistakes of the heart. Kline again draws an equivalency here: cooking without a recipe equals following one's heart and following a recipe equals following one's head; Angela must learn that pursuing the life she wants is like cooking without a recipe. She must internalize her own message of learning to trust oneself, tune out the societal dictates and familial voices of doubt that would dissuade her from being true to herself, or she is doomed to perpetuate a cycle of regret initiated by her own Nonna.

While her closing reflections communicate some ambivalence about whether she will stay on in Maine, she does admit that all of the ingredients for a life she could appreciate are present. This ambiguous-yet-hopeful ending suggests that Angela will assemble a happy life with the ingredients she has on hand, doing so intuitively and with pleasurable results. "I can be open to change, to chance – to the possibility of happiness," she muses; this idea is not too far removed from adapting one's menu plan for a cooking class or dinner party based on what is available at the farmers' market.

While this idea completes a consideration of the ways in which the recipes within the text contribute to the novel's embedded narrative, what remains to contend with is the appendix of recipes at end of book, ranging from Nonna's hometown dishes to Angela's coffeeshop pastries. In it, Kline encourages readers to contact her via her author website

with questions or for other recipes from the novel not provided. In selecting and including these particular recipes in the appendix, Kline underscores their importance to the plot (for example, the appendix includes Nonna's White Bolognese, which she cooked for the priest who ruined her) and calls upon the reader to extend her engagement with the text by going beyond merely reading to actively participating by producing (and consuming) the recipes. But, the inclusion of Angela's Daily Grind baked goods (oatmeal chocolate chip cookies, "Nonna's Banana Bread," "Lemony Pound Cake") enables readers to participate in Angela's departure from the script set forth for her; at the same time, the presence of the recipe for White Bolognese invites the reader to identify with Nonna via reproducing the recipe that functions as the metonym for her forbidden love affair. However, it could be argued that, given the novel's privileging of cooking without a recipe, both literally and metaphorically, there is a tension between text and paratext that creates a hierarchy of knowing between the intuitive, expert cook (Nonna and Angela) and the rest of us. The effect is one of effectively distancing the reader from the text's narrative thrust while also drawing her in to the community of cooking-class students that populate the text and the imagined meta-textual class comprising every reader of Kline's novel.

Both novels, while depicting communities with women at their centers, bring readers (ostensibly female) into the conversation taking place within the narratives via the recipes included in the texts, revealing both personal and kitchen secrets. Both novels contain recipes intended for the reader to replicate in her own kitchen, enabling her to extend the novel's narrative into her own life, thereby rendering herself a member of a

new kind of recipe club. The novel cookbook, then, recovers the "feminine" aspects of the novel that were elided in the masculine codification discussed by Farr:

> In the move to legitimate the novel for scholarly study, [the academy] left behind the novel's defining democratic, material, and feminine qualities: its authors' tendency to address readers, angling for sympathetic connections and offering lessons or moral education; its ability to invite passionate identification with characters who come alive for readers; its function not only as art but also as communication, inspiring readers to talk to one another and to pass books along to encourage new conversations and more sharing of ideas; its insistent demand for engagement in repeated calls to action or social justice; its intimate, domestic settings; and, finally, its call for participation in the marketplace. (207)

The novel cookbook builds upon these characteristics, overtly encouraging the reader to try the recipes for herself, from the detailed instructions and explanations embedded within the texts to the invitations to seek out further recipes through the authors and their websites. Thus a community among the text, author, and reader is forged, although the dimensions of the communities created by *The Way Life Should Be* and *The Recipe Club* take on very different characteristics. In the case of *The Way Life Should Be*, the community is an imagined, meta-textual one wherein the reader can partake of the recipes and Nonna's expertise, but there is no expectation imposed upon the reader to reach beyond the enclosed space of her own mind and kitchen, even though she is not the only

intended participant. Conversely, the privileging of identification and women's search for their authentic selves figures *The Recipe Club* as a site, albeit highly commodified, in which women can find community both within and beyond the page. *The Recipe Club* website (http://www.therecipeclubbook.com/) encourages readers to establish their own local recipe clubs, send in their favorite "food-themed story" (a sampling of the stories found on the blog includes "Scary Foods," in which a woman traveling in Cambodia must eat live scorpions; and the story of a woman whose mother baked a lemon cake and then died – the woman ate her mother's final cake after the funeral) and the recipe that goes with it, and possibly have their club featured on the site's *Food & Friendship* blog. Additionally, the authors visited local Recipe Clubs while on their book tour in late 2009 and early 2010; these include clubs in Seattle; Boulder, Colorado; Park Slope, Brooklyn; Houston; and Piedmont, California, which prides itself on its multiracial composition. In this way, the relationship forged between the two women within the novel is extended into and built upon in women's actual lives.

However, not all novel cookbooks create a feminist utopia or undertake a project of empowerment or transubstantiation. Within the universe of *The Icing on the Cupcake*, cooking remains a static site in which a narcissistic young woman rehabilitates her odious "authentic self" (6), but the novel misfires in its failure to create a meaningful counternarrative of femininity, its facile, tone-deaf deployment of privilege, and its tendency to pit women against one another.

The Cupcake: Adorably Ironic Feminist Icon or Portable Hegemony?

The cupcake has enjoyed an extended period of popularity in America over the past decade, thanks in no small part to the HBO series *Sex and the City*. In a scene from Season 3, which originally aired in the summer of 2000, Carrie and Miranda discuss Carrie's crush on her eventual fiancé, Aiden, while seated outside of Magnolia Bakery in Greenwich Village and eating pink-frosted cupcakes. Not only did this cameo rocket Magnolia Bakery to fame (the small shop had to extend its business hours to accommodate the curious fans after the episode aired), but it is also credited with kicking off a nationwide "cupcake craze" that has only recently cooled.[91] This craze prompted a prolonged discourse of cupcakes, in which they were variously described as nostalgic, retro, guilt-free, uncomplex, familiar, comforting, "more American than apple pie," and, most tellingly, "feminine and girlie."[92] It makes sense, then, that as the cupcake rose to prominence with an assist from a pop-culture juggernaut like *Sex and the City*, it would be adopted, per Groskup, as the icon of ironic feminist domesticity. That the cupcake's rise to prominence coincides with the rise in popularity of the novel cookbook suggests that *The Icing on the Cupcake* by Jennifer Ross was inevitable.

The novel follows Ansley Waller, a spoiled, catty Baylor University[93] sorority girl who must find a new path in life after her dream of marrying rich and raising a family is shattered. Her fiancé, Parish, abruptly breaks up with her at a fraternity party after encountering Ansley's cruel, selfish "authentic self," which she began to reveal after

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[91] In the spring of 2010, the cupcake was dethroned as a trendy dessert in favor of Parisian-style macarons, thanks to the television series *Gossip Girl*. See Ulaby (2010).

[92] See Gross (2009) and Kershaw (2007).

[93] A conservative Southern Baptist university in Waco, Texas, that censures any behavior that may run counter to its Christian principles. For example, it is against school policy for unmarried male and female students to live together, even off-campus, regardless of whether they are romantically involved.

becoming engaged, one too many times. Her dreams of a life as a wealthy Dallas socialite gone, Ansley moves to New York to live with her extremely wealthy grandmother, Vivian, who has been estranged from the family since before Ansley was born. The Waller women are figured as expert bakers from the outset of the novel; the morning after her unceremonious public dumping, Ansley gets to work on a batch of blood-red cupcakes to process her loss. (The recipe for the cupcakes, called "Seeing Red and Tasting Chocolate, or Shot Through the Heart," follows a few pages later.) As she bakes, it becomes clear that Ansley's baking relies heavily on both precision and hereditary instinct: "She had baking in her genes. […] They were natural alchemists, able to turn the most basic ingredients into creations that people always wanted more of" (136). Again we see the presence of *il regalo* — albeit within a white, upper-class context — a talent for scratch cookery unsullied by external forces like Betty Crocker.

Later, Ansley's family's matrilineal cookbook, handed down by generations of women dating back to 1853, helps her to solve the mystery of converting small-batch recipes to industrial-sized ones, revealing to her that "flour compresses in large volumes, needs to be weighed rather than measured, for consistency" (191-2). The cookbook is representative of the teaching that takes place between a mother and daughter in the kitchen; each woman in the family must earn a spot in the cookbook by having her recipes vetted by two other cookbook contributors, ideally the woman's mother and grandmother. Because Ansley's mother and grandmother are estranged, she harbors little hope of claiming her space in the cookbook, despite the fact that they are bound together by the cookbook itself, and their mutual love of and talent for cooking and baking.

That Ansley has learned from the book rather than direct instruction from her mother speaks to the insularity of Ansley's work in the kitchen: despite the fact that she bakes cupcakes for other people to consume, the objective is always to suit her own desires. The novel itself serves as a similarly closed circuit: Ross peppers the story with tips of the trade: using an ice-cream scoop to distribute the cupcake batter makes for cupcakes that are uniform in size (28), placing the cupcake pan on a baking stone results in cupcakes with aesthetically pleasing domes (29), the perfect hue of beaten butter that signals its optimal consistency for use in batter and frosting (75), and that "baked goods should age well for a couple [of] days. If they don't, you've either overcooked them, used too much flour or overbeat the batter" (196). This marriage of pedagogy with narrative is certainly a salient feature of the novel cookbook, but any empowering message *The Icing on the Cupcake* might attempt is undermined by the fact that its main character is deeply unlikable in that she polices other women and their bodies, publicly shames other women, and revels in the fact that she used a manufactured persona other than what she considers her authentic self to attract a suitable husband. Even in the midst of her "redemption" arc, it is nearly impossible to identify with Ansley's maturation from shallow, unkind sorority girl to successful business owner with a small circle of devoted friends.

As Ansley works on her "Seeing Red" cupcakes, the omniscient narration states that she "took the confidence she gained from baking and applied it to all other areas of her life. She learned to dominate, in a very Southern way, every grade and group of girls she joined from then on" (28). Like Esquivel's Tita, Ansley is able to control other

people through her cooking; unlike Tita, her power is not allegorical, it is deployed in her own narcissistic self-interest. Indeed, Ansley's abuse of her power results in her effective ejection from her safe sphere, forcing her to reconfigure her life within a context that renders her Southern ethos ineffective. Brought low and her identity put to question, Ansley must reframe her relationship to her baking and her future. Fortunately, despite Ansley's regional displacement, the eminently American cupcake proves portable enough to serve as her transformative mechanism, one that enables her to enter the market doing something that she loves. Yet, problems with the plot lead one to wonder whether there is a unique, meaningful story to be told here or if the novel is simply a cupcake-recipe delivery mechanism masquerading as an inspiring tale of self-reinvention.

One major problem with the novel is that Ansley's journey to reinvention is simply too fantastical to comprehend. She gets a "cupcakery" off the ground in a matter of weeks, including hiring and overseeing contractors performing renovations on her space, obtaining permits and licenses from the city, testing dozens of bulk recipes, trash picking for furniture, hiring and training staff, carefully sourcing high-quality ingredients, and frosting and organizing her cupcakes on opening day so that "each cupcake had a different face made of candy on it […] every cupcake like a different panel in a comic book" (252). Conveniently enough, Ansley is able to bankroll this project thanks to $285,000 in investments courtesy of an inheritance from her father's parents; her business degree enables her to determine a suitable budget to open her shop, as well as to calculate her operating expenses and daily sales goals. And, of course, the bakery (called The Icing on the Cupcake) is a huge hit, despite the fact that Parish's new fiancée (and

Ansley's sorority-sister-cum-archrival), Patty, makes multiple attempts to sabotage the endeavor, including an anonymous smear campaign featuring fliers plastered on the shop's door and windows reading, "This bakery uses GMO, pesticide-laden ingredients" (267). Ansley's reaction is one of horror and defensiveness:

> The Manhattan mothers would never stand for this. If they read these fliers, they wouldn't dare walk into the bakery, even to use the bathroom. […] The funny thing was, she'd worked hard to find upstate New York farmers who were organic and independent. She bought her eggs and butter from farms of less than fifty acres that used no pesticides. For her grand opening she even imported butter from small French farms. She had gone out of her way to be organic and environmentally friendly. (267-8)

Ansley is keenly aware of her audience — the well-heeled Manhattan mothers she worked to woo in the early days of her market research — and capitulates to their values. Her awareness of these values and her access to the materials that capitulate to those values speaks to both the Manhattan mothers' socioeconomic class and Ansley's as well; within this context, to eschew GMO and pesticide-laden ingredients and to source local, artisan ingredients for cupcakes is to enact one's privilege, not to engender community or to take any particular stand against industrial agriculture or Big Food. Simply put, Ansley chooses these ingredients for her own gain, which is to appeal to a group of privileged consumers who would think nothing of paying $4 for a cupcake, especially one bearing ingredients that serve as a reflection of who they imagine themselves to be.

Further plot points find Ansley rejecting Parish's request to take him back, but she finds she is no longer interested in the swanky Dallas life she once idealized, preferring her new cupcake-centric life in Manhattan. Ansley's mother, Hattie, grudgingly reconciles with Vivian as they stand over Ansley's hospital bed as she recovers from a car accident. All is forgiven, the loose ends are neatly tied, and everyone gets dessert. The aggregate effect of this adherence to a plug-and-play formula, as well as Ross' blind disregard to the implications of her characters' class privilege — indeed, the message seems to be that with enough money, one can not only reinvent herself, but she can also heal generational rifts among the women in her family — is to render the novel itself the equivalent of a literary cupcake: uncomplex, uniform, portable, an ephemeral luxury. There is no counternarrative of femininity here, no interrogation of the hegemonic structures that serve to subjugate women, no satirical takedowns of commodity culture; there is merely a shallow girl who "finds herself" (and even that project is unsatisfactory) thanks to the capital afforded her by a patriarchal inheritance and the pedagogy provided by a matrilineal community cookbook (not too unlike the project of the Pioneer Woman). To this end, the "alchemy" Ansley deploys within the kitchen does not extend from the text to the reader, nor is there any meaningful or clearly defined community attached to the "edible dynamic" of the recipes; they are merely the cloying icing on the unpalatable cupcake that is the text. While *The Icing on the Cupcake* resembles the spirit of its predecessors, *Heartburn* and *Like Water for Chocolate*, in that the recipes function as a means of expressing and processing anguish, ultimately, these recipes are not meant to document catharsis, they are meant for one individual's profit.

As previously discussed in this chapter, third-wave feminist depictions of domesticity are ostensibly detached from the ethics of care so deeply entrenched in the discourse of femininity. While *Heartburn* and *Like Water for Chocolate* do depict the selflessness and sacrifices of Rachel and Tita, those sacrifices engender a rhetoric of anger that empower the women's expressions of self via their cooking while at the same time embedding a story of foodways and communities within those expressions. The movement from a second- to a third-wave feminist ethos in the novel cookbook, though, reveals that it is indeed possible to construct a community cookbook that values both an emphasis on self-care (a focus on the individual) and on that individual extending that care to her community. Without a web of connection to self, the land (via local foods and culinary practices), and a community of meaning, the novel cookbook risks the homogenizing effects of Big Food. Given the profound cultural significance of protecting and preserving our histories and our values via community and novel cookbooks, if we allow them to be absorbed into the mainstream, what is left to fight for? Ultimately, we must decide which we value more: the cohesive whole of a scratch-baked cake or the individualized fragmentation of the adorable, portable cupcake.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have endeavored to present and analyze the ways in which women attempt to "only connect" by detaching their power as citizens from the alienating machinations of capitalism and direct that power toward asserting their personhood and representing their communities via the culinary idiom. In it, I examined the ways that food bloggers engage (or do not engage) in criticisms of contemporary American food culture; how feminist vegetarian communities present counternarratives of community via disavowing mainstream foodways; how diasporic Indian women push back against the invisibility of migration, making themselves visible via narratives set in and around their kitchens; and how the novel cookbook harbors subversive representations of female subjectivity.

As my dissertation has evolved into its current form, my near-constant focus on the issues and projects outlined above have inspired me to become increasingly involved in the local food scene, both as a semi-regular blogger, freelance writer, wannabe locavore, and amateur cook. As such, I feel it is appropriate to provide a portrait of what it looks like to "only connect" via a focus on local, sustainable foods in Austin, Texas, in 2011. Austin's local food community is vibrant and active, with a large community of farm-to-table restaurateurs, farmers, food bloggers and slow-food practitioners at its center.

Austin currently enjoys a thriving famers' market economy, with markets taking place in and near the city nearly every day of the week. The largest of the operations is overseen by the Sustainable Food Center, which hosts two markets (one downtown, one in the southern suburbs) on Saturday mornings and one in Central Austin on Wednesdays. A third independent market operates in the parking lot of a southwestern shopping mall on Saturday mornings. Two other independent markets, HOPE and the 6701 Burnet Road Market, offer smaller, more intimate market experiences. HOPE in particular serves as an exemplar of the project I have outlined over the course of my study. Part of the Helping Other People Everywhere campaign, the HOPE farmers market features handmade crafts, local musicians moonlighting as knife sharpeners, vegan cooking demonstrations, live music, and a donation-based children's area, where small ones can do arts and crafts while their parents shop. The HOPE campaign started in 2007, when its organizers recruited artists to help raise awareness of the humanitarian crisis in Darfur, Sudan. In addition to contributing to humanitarian campaigns in Kenya, Congo, and Darfur, HOPE also devotes attention to causes in America, including Green Doors, which provides stable housing for the homeless and those in poverty housing. Other local campaigns include UpLift Austin, which offers environmental stewardship education to Austin charter school students, and Empower Art, which provides arts education to Austin school children. Through all of these various manifestations of its mission, the HOPE farmers market balances global concerns with local ones, with stands selling locally sourced organic vegetables, handmade pies, and small-batch charcuterie as its locus. The farmers markets also enjoy the patronage of local chefs, such as James Holmes

of Olivia and Bryce Gilmore of Odd Duck Farm to Trailer and Barley Swine, who stake their daily and weekly menus on what is available in each farmer's stall.

But it isn't just chefs with the benefit of a brick and mortar restaurant who innovate based on local ingredients. Wander down the eastern sidewalk of the downtown farmers market on Saturday morning and you can encounter some of Austin's most successful purveyors of handcrafted artisan foods, all showcasing local ingredients and working to recover traditional methods of preparing, serving, and storing food. Kocurek Family Charcuterie, owned by Lawrence and Lee Ann Kocurek, specialize in patés, terrines, rilletes, and sausages. The couple's project is rooted firmly in Slow Food, emphasizing the importance not only of recovering and celebrating arcane European practices of preserving meat, but also of understanding how an animal is raised and the necessity of using as much of it as possible (a practice Larry Kocurek charmingly describes as "from the rooter to the tooter"). Lee Ann Kocurek argues that to use every part of the animal is to communicate an understanding of sustainability and an appreciation for the life that is attached to the animal product itself.[94] Along those same lines, Jesse Griffiths of Dai Due, a butcher shop and supper club, makes and sells bacon, sausage, chorizo, roasting chickens and quail, mustards, various pickles, and butters using local, in-season ingredients and grass-fed meats sourced from local farms. In addition, Dai Due offers three-day organized hunting schools (including one specifically for women) on Madroño Ranch in the Texas Hill Country, as well as hog- and deer-

[94] Remde, Christian, dir. *Charcuterie*. Perf. Kocurek Lawrence, and Kocurek Lee Ann. 2001. Film. <http://vimeo.com/26989733>.

butchering classes. The supper club functions as a "roving restaurant" with services at local farms and boutique hotels. The multi-course dinners are served al fresco at a communal table and are meant to showcase locally sourced ingredients, from proteins to condiments to cocktails. Stephanie McClenny, the woman behind the small-batch artisan preserves company Confituras, debuted her salted caramel pear butter at the farmers' market in September 2010; four months later, her Texas Fig preserves, made with local figs and Round Rock honey, won the preserves category at the inaugural Good Food Awards, which recognized purveyors of food products "demonstrating the highest standards in taste and sustainability in food production."[95] These three practitioners of Slow Food are indicative of what is happening on the ground in Austin in terms of a community gathering around the shared values of local, sustainable, ethical food that is intimately connected to the land.

The glue that helps to connect the food purveyors to the broader community are Austin's food bloggers. While there are more than 200 food blogs in Austin, a core group of about 100 comprise the Austin Food Bloggers' Alliance, a nonprofit organization formed in early 2011. The Alliance, of which I am a member, aims to "support each other and our community through classes, social events, and philanthropy."[96] In addition to offering seminars on photography and copyright protection to its members, the Alliance also partners with community organizations to raise awareness and funds. The Alliance's

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[95] Pack, MM. "Confituras Wins at Good Food Awards in San Francisco." *Austin Chronicle* 01 28 2011. n. pag. Web. 27 Sep. 2011. <http://www.austinchronicle.com/food/2011-01-28/confituras-wins-at-good-food-awards-in-san-francisco/>.

[96] "About." *Austin Food Blogger Alliance*. N.p., n.d. Web. 27 Sep 2011. <http://austinfoodbloggers.org/about/>.

first organized philanthropic event took place at the Capital Area Food Bank, where attendees learned about SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) benefits and were challenged to come up with recipes that those who received the bare minimum of $16 a month could afford. The recipes that the bloggers developed are now available online as a digital cookbook in exchange for a minimum $5 donation to the food bank. The Alliance's second philanthropic event, a fundraiser for SafePlace, an organization dedicated to ending sexual and domestic violence, took place in August. The Alliance partnered with the Alamo Drafthouse movie theater for a screening of the movie *Waitress* (2007) with a pie sale following the film. The proceeds of ticket and pie sales exceeded $2,000, and they went directly to SafePlace.

Independent of the Alliance, local food bloggers have organized bake sales to benefit the victims of the earthquake and tsunami in Japan, as well as the Labor Day fires in nearby Bastrop, Texas. (The Austin Bakes for Japan event raised more than $10,000 for the cause; proceeds for the Bastrop bake sale exceeded $12,000.) This summer's drought places those of us who strive to eat as close to our land as possible in a precarious position, as our local terroir is threatened by lack of rain and near-daily threat of fire. Food blogger Kristi Willis, who writes *Austin Farm to Table* (http://www.kristisfarmtotable.com/), in lieu of a traditional birthday party, organized a meetup at the downtown farmers' market: "Your gift to me is to buy something for yourself from a local farm or food artisan. This heat and drought have been tough for all of us, but farmers have really suffered. Let's show them some love" ("My Birthday Wish: Meet Me at the Market and Buy Local," August 2011). Both the Alliance's and Willis'

efforts demonstrate that Austin's food bloggers are deeply committed to knitting together a community, both online and in "real life," by using their time, dollars, and power as consumers to not only connect with one another, but to *do good*. What's more, of the 109 members of the Austin Food Bloggers Alliance, 87 are women, which suggests that what is happening in the case studies within my dissertation is also happening right now in Austin, Texas.

Austin activists also endeavor to "only connect" via food beyond the nebulous margins of the blogosphere. One potent example of this is the Red Rabbit Cooperative Bakery. Founded in June 2010 by Cathy Ruiz, Gayathri Marasinghe, and Jaclyn Osowski and borne of the founders' dissatisfaction with their jobs at a corporate bakery, Red Rabbit is a worker-owned cooperative that makes vegan baked goods and pastries in the interest of "exceed[ing] the conventional standard."[97] In May 2011, the cooperative made its [incredibly delicious] vegan donuts available on the weekends at local coffee shops and at the Wheatsville Co-op grocery; the Black Star Co-op Pub and Brewery carries Red Rabbit's vegan hamburger buns and baguettes. On October 8, 2011, Red Rabbit delivered dozens of donuts to the Occupy Austin protesters at City Hall. The Austin protest is an extension of the Occupy Wall Street protests in New York City, which emerged out of growing outrage at the profound economic inequality in the United States and corporate control of government. By feeding Occupy Austin protestors with their vegan donuts as

[97] Red Rabbit Cooperative Bakery. "Info." Facebook.com, n.d. Web. 12 Oct 2011. <https://www.facebook.com/

an expression of solidarity, Red Rabbit put the ideals and ideas at the heart of this dissertation in action.

Here in Texas, we face not only the increasing stranglehold corporations have on our day-to-day lives, but also a crippling drought that threatens to hobble the state's economy and ecosystem for decades to come. The stakes are higher than ever for our community to rally around our farmers and our foodways, for if they were to disappear, so might our connections to one another, our land, and to more global concerns.

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Vita

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